Sri Lanka National Plan of Action (SL-NPOA) for Sharks, Rays, and Chimaeras

2025 – 2030

DFAR

Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR)

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Executive Summary

The revised National Plan of Action (NPOA) for Sharks, Rays, and Chimaeras in Sri Lanka (2025-2030) outlines a comprehensive strategy for the conservation and sustainable management of these species within Sri Lanka's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and in international waters. The plan addresses the threats faced by sharks, rays, and chimaeras, primarily overfishing and bycatch, and aims to prevent their functional extinction.

This NPOA emphasises three core objectives:

1. Research
2. Sustainable Management
3. Awareness, Compliance, & Enforcement.

The research focuses on improving species-specific data, including life history parameters and stock assessments for priority species. It also aims to enhance the integration of external datasets into national statistics. The management objectives involve revising national regulations to improve further management for sharks, rays, and chimaeras, transitioning gear types, and introducing habitat management. The awareness and compliance strategy emphasises effective outreach to stakeholders, training for fisheries officers, and rigorous enforcement to ensure compliance with regulations.

The plan also integrates the precautionary principle, ensuring that protective measures are implemented even when scientific data is incomplete. It aligns with international commitments, such as the IOTC and CITES, and other related measures to ensure Sri Lanka's actions are consistent with global conservation efforts. Through this NPOA, Sri Lanka commits to a proactive approach to safeguard vulnerable species and secure the benefits of marine biodiversity for future generations.

SPECIAL NOTE: The following pages of this NPOA include the long-term vision and the strategic objectives for the upcoming 5 years, along with their objectives, activities, indicators, relevant agencies, and timeframe.

These form the core of the NPOA and provide readers and users with the relevant information to make proactive decisions towards the effective management and conservation of sharks, rays, and chimaeras in Sri Lanka.

All detailed supporting and background information can be found in the Annexes, available as an electronic document.

List of Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Key Definitions

AD	Assistant Director
BEEZ	Beyond the EEZ
Bycatch	The incidental capture of a species that is often landed for its value (also referred to as "secondary catch" or "non-directed catch")
CFHC	Ceylon Fishery Harbours Corporation
Chondrichthyans	Sharks, rays, and chimaeras
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMS	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
Conservation	Actions to prevent a species' extinction (or habitat destruction), and ensure they can maintain their role within the natural ecosystem.
CPUE	Catch Per Unit Effort
DFAR	The Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
DG	Director General
DL	Disc Length
DW	Disc Width
DWC	The Department of Wildlife Conservation
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
Elasmobranchs	Sharks and rays (*also see above definition for Chondrichthyans)*
ETP	Endangered, threatened, and protected
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FARA	The Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act
FFBA	The Fisheries Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats Act
FFPO	The Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance
Finning	The act of removing the fins and disposing of the carcass at sea
FMA	Fishery Management Area
HS	High Seas
HS Codes	Harmonised System Codes
IDAY	Inboard single-day boats
IFS	Introduction From the Sea (for CITES)
IMUL	Inboard multi-day boats
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
IPOA	International Plan of Action
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUU	Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing

MPA	Marine Protected Area
MTRB	Motorised traditional boats
NARA	National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency
NDF	Non-detriment finding (for CITES)
NTRB	Non-motorised traditional boats
NPOA	National Plan of Action
OFRP	Outboard engine fiberglass reinforced plastic boats
PCL	Pre-Caudal Length
REC	Recreational fishing boats
SAR	Shark Assessment Report
Sharks	FAO definition: all sharks, rays, and chimaeras (Class Chondrichthyes).
SLAWEN	Sri Lanka Wildlife Enforcement Network
SLC	Sri Lanka Customs
SLN	Sri Lanka Navy
TAC	Total allowable catch
TL	Total Length
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System

National Plan of Action for Sharks, Rays, and Chimaeras

Species overview

Sharks, rays, and chimaeras (Chondrichthyans) are declining globally due to their specific life characteristic and overfishing, despite their vital roles in marine ecosystems, food security, and livelihoods.

This Plan outlines key actions to establish the foundations of effective conservation and management to ensure these species fulfil their ecological roles while ensuring continued benefits for fisher communities.

Long-term vision

EFFECTIVELY CONSERVE [1] AND MANAGE [2] SHARKS, RAYS, AND CHIMAERAS (CHONDRICHTHYANS) IN SRI LANKA AND THE HIGH SEAS.

Strategic Objectives for 2025-2030

1. **RESEARCH:** *encourage and support improved species-specific data for chondrichthyans, with relevant biological and ecological parameters for at least 10 priority species, to enable the development of (data-poor) stock assessments and inform proactive management.*

2. **MANAGEMENT:** *revise existing "shark" regulations to incorporate rays and chimaeras; protect and sustainable manage chondrichthyan species known to be functionally extinct and/or commercially extinct and/or overexploited [3]; proactively protect heavily depleted and/or rare and/or unique chondrichthyan species and/or their habitats; regulate all fisheries and trade of vulnerable chondrichthyans (including those identified to be through stock assessments), and initiate drafting of a recovery plan.*

3. **AWARENESS, COMPLIANCE, & ENFORCEMENT:** *conduct effective awareness and outreach to enable better research, and for stakeholders, fisheries officers, and enforcement authorities to ensure good understanding, compliance, and enforcement of management*

[1] *Conserve*: the intention to prevent a species extinction and ensure it can maintain its role within the ecosystem.

[2] *Manage:* how we accomplish our intent to conserve. This could be through protecting heavily depleted species or the habitats they utilise, regulating the catch/trade of other species that can be sustainably managed, and identifying species that may not require any level of regulation at this point.

[3] This is a precautionary measure in case of recovery of the species.

OBJECTIVE & ACTIVITIES	INDICATORS	AGENCIES	TIMELINE
1. RESEARCH			
1.1. <u>LANDINGS AND TRADE DATA COLLECTION</u>		DFAR & NARA & other institutions under the supervision of, or in collaboration with, NARA	Throughout By Y3
1.1.1 Encourage species-specific data collection for 10 of the identified priority species (see 1.2.1, below), including: number of specimens, sex and maturity, dimensions (DW and DL for rays, TL and PCL for sharks), and where possible, other factors like weight, area of capture, sale prices, etc.	- Increased biological and catch/landings data availability for the 10 priority species - Data available from more landing sites and/or more frequently.		
1.1.2 Collect species-specific data on the landings and trade of shark and ray dried fish, skins, and shark liver oil. This can include (for each type of trade): species harvested and utilised, volumes, uses, value, and socio-economic factors (drivers and reliance upon trade).	- Number of species, estimated annual volumes and values for dried meat, ray skins, and liver oil trade. - Number of interviews or case studies completed on trade and socioeconomics.		
1.2. <u>COLLECTION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA</u>			
1.2.1 Collection of socio-economic data along the coast of Sri Lanka to understand the people dependent on this fishery	- Number of families, individuals, and the proportionate value of shark and ray fisheries to their incomes.		

1.3. <u>EXPAND KNOWLEDGE ON PRIORITY SPECIES AND/OR AREAS</u>			
1.3.1 Conduct a "quick and easy" species priority assessment (a pre-PSA analysis) to determine the (top 20) priority species.	- A list of the top 20 priority species for research and management is available.		In Y1
1.3.2 Conduct studies to determine age at maturity, growth, reproductive cycles, fecundity, and other key life history parameters for the top 10 priority species.	- Increased data on life history parameters for the top 10 priority species.		By Y5
1.3.3 Apply data-limited and semi-quantitative stock assessment methods (e.g., PSA's, length-based indicators, catch trends) for the 10-priority shark and ray species. Use available fishery-dependent data, life history parameters, expert knowledge, and qualitative inputs to assess stock status, identify potential overexploitation, and recommend precautionary management decisions.	- Conclusive stock assessments for at least 10 priority species are available with clear management recommendations.		By Y5
1.3.4 Identify critical habitats (e.g., nursery/pupping/egg laying grounds, seasonal feeding/aggregation areas), and habitat use across life stages.	- New critical habitats identified and mapped across life stages.		By Y5
1.3.5 In identified ISRAs, collect fisheries data, and spatial data of fisher activities or other anthropogenic pressures, and recommend mitigation measures.	- Maps with spatial and fisheries pressures for the ISRA's, with management recommendations, are published.		By Y3
1.3.6 Identify, trial, and evaluate gear modifications or handling practices that reduce the incidental catch and mortality of protected or threatened species in different fisheries.	- New knowledge on gear modifications or handling practices that reduce bycatch or mortality of protected/threatened species.		By Y4

OBJECTIVE & ACTIVITIES	INDICATORS	AGENCIES	TIMELINE
1.3.7 Analyse and compare species-specific trade data (e.g., volumes, products, values) with fishery landings data to detect discrepancies or unreported harvests, and to identify potential data gaps in monitoring and enforcement.	- Number of species with matched trade and landings data analysed for discrepancies.		By Y4
1.3.8 Identify and quantify unreported chondrichthyan mortalities (e.g., discards, ghost fishing, post-release mortality) to improve total mortality estimates.	- Estimates are available for annual total mortality through cryptic mortality.		By Y4
1.3.9 Study post-release survival rates of sharks and rays captured as bycatch, with a focus on species protected under national regulations. Assess physiological and behavioural stress indicators where feasible.	- Survival rate estimates are available for protected species to assess the efficacy of non-retention measures.		By Y5
1.3.10 Assess and determine the effectiveness of current fines and penalties for IUU fishing of chondrichthyans.	- An assessment is available on the effectiveness of current deterrents for IUU fishing.		By Y5

OBJECTIVE & ACTIVITIES	INDICATORS	AGENCIES	TIMELINE
1.4. EXPAND DATA COLLECTION			
1.4.1 Conduct a questionnaire study, disseminated to all relevant universities, research organisations, and individuals, to collate all existing knowledge available and research projects being undertaken on sharks, rays, and chimaeras in Sri Lanka.	- A compiled summary of shark, ray, and chimaera research projects and knowledge holders in Sri Lanka.	DFAR, NARA *with insights from relevant universities, research organisations, and independent researchers*	By Y2
1.4.2 Develop a standard template to aggregate fisheries data voluntarily provided by relevant universities, research organisations, and independent researchers, considering validation of species identification and potential challenges related to data duplication (i.e., double counting). Determine how best to incorporate such data into annual statistics.	- A standardised data-sharing template is distributed, and at least 3 are reporting back. - A proposed method to validate and integrate voluntarily shared data into national statistics.		By Y3
1.4.3 Identify other types of valuable data for incorporation into national datasets and/or analyses to inform fisheries management.	- A list of additional non-fisheries data sources identified for use in national fisheries assessments or decision-making.		By Y3

2. MANAGEMENT			
2.1. <u>REVISE NATIONAL SHARK REGULATIONS</u>			
2.1.1 Update the "shark" definition to incorporate rays and chimaeras.	- A published regulation with an updated definition of "sharks,".	DFAR	By Y2[5]
2.1.2 Include a pre-emptive clause to ensure any shark, ray, or chimaera that is retained is landed whole.	- The regulation requires all retained chondrichthyans to be landed whole.		
2.1.3 Provide a phase-out period for a non-retention measure for mobulid rays[4].	- A phase-out schedule is in place for other threatened species.		
2.1.4 Include best-handling and release practices guidelines to improve the survival of non-retained sharks, rays, and chimaeras.	- National guidelines on best handling and release practices are included in the regulation.		
2.1.5 Require all IMUL and IDAY vessels to carry the ETP live-release kits.	- The regulation requires IMUL and IDAY vessels to carry ETP live-release kits.		
2.1.6 Reporting at a species-level of all incidentally captured protected species and their status at release.	- Data available on the number of protected specimens released and their condition (at a species level).		

[4] This is also a requirement under IOTC CMM 19/03: https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/compliance/cmm/iotc_cmm_1903.pdf

[5] Draft is included in the annex. Drafting to be completed within 2 months. Ministerial and other approvals, printing and publishing to be completed within 12 months.

2.2. REVISE OTHER NATIONAL REGULATIONS 2.2.1 Provide a phase-out period and prohibit the use of wire leaders. 2.2.2 Establish a maximum length of 2.5 km for all gillnets. 2.2.3 Prohibit the use of entangling or drifting FADs. 2.2.4 Phase out J hooks and transition to circle hooks.	- A regulation phases out and prohibits the use of wire leaders. - A maximum gillnet length is established for the high seas. - The use of entangling or drifting FADs is prohibited. - A phase-out schedule is in place for J hooks.	- DFAR	By Y2
2.3. HABITAT MANAGEMENT 2.3.1 Develop and implement at least one species and habitat management plan to improve the status of focal species in at least one of the designated Important Shark and Ray Areas in Sri Lanka: https://sharkrayareas.org/resources/isra-factsheets/?_sfm_jurisdiction=Sri%20Lanka [6].	- At least one management plan with clear conservation outcomes for focal species and addressing key threats is published, implemented and monitored.	DFAR & NARA *with support from DWC and experts as required*	By Y4

[6] The Baththalangunduwa ISRA is identified as the highest priority for urgent action, while the Pigeon Island ISRA is the lowest priority as it is already a designated MPA.

2.4. <u>IMPROVE CITES COMPLIANCE</u>			
2.4.1 Submit 0 (or any other) quotas to CITES for all nationally protected or regulated CITES-listed species.	- Quotas for Sri Lankan CITES-listed species are published, enabling international monitoring and regulation.	- DFAR & NARA - DWC	In Y1
2.4.2 Implement the Introduction From the Sea (IFS) certification.	- IFS certificates are issued, as required.		By Y2
2.4.3 Revise, or for newly listed species, develop new NDFs.	- Publish NDFs for all Sri Lankan CITES-listed species.		By Y3
2.4.4 Support, or lead, the listing of threatened chondrichthyans on the appropriate CITES appendices.	- Sri Lanka maintains its proactive stance at CITES for chondrichthyan trade regulation.		Throughout

2.5. <u>ENHANCE IOTC ENGAGEMENT ON SHARKS AND RAYS</u>			
2.5.1 Ensure compliance with IOTC Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) on sharks and rays.	- National regulations aligned with IOTC CMMs for sharks and rays.	- DFAR, NARA	In Y1
2.5.2 Maintain attendance and increase engagement at the IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB) on shark-related agenda items.	- Sri Lanka maintains regular attendance and active participation in the IOTC WPEB on shark-related agenda items.		Throughout
2.5.3 Improve reporting of species-specific shark and ray data (catch, effort, size-frequency data) to the IOTC.	- Increase in species-specific shark and ray data reporting to the IOTC.		By Y5
2.5.4 Support, or lead, in collaboration with other IOTC members, proposals to enhance shark and ray management (e.g., non-retention of threatened species, data improvements, spatial protection).	- Sri Lanka supports or co-leads at least one IOTC proposal to strengthen shark and ray management.		By Y5
2.5.5 Encourage data-limited and semi-quantitative stock assessment methods for sharks and rays at the IOTC WPEB.	- Data-limited and semi-quantitative stock assessment approaches for sharks and rays are initiated by the IOTC WPEB.		By Y5

2.6. <u>ESTABLISH A REVIEW AND MONITORING MECHANISM</u> 2.7.1 Establish a scientific committee with representatives from DFAR, NARA, universities, and other experts to review regulatory proposals and recommend science-based or precautionary measures, including research priorities. 2.7.2 Establish a multi-stakeholder steering committee to coordinate implementation, review NPOA progress, and guide future planning through regular in-person meetings.	- Scientific committee is established and operational, with a ToR and procedures for reviewing chondrichthyan regulations. - Research guidance and at least one recommendation are developed, or a regulatory proposal is reviewed. - The steering committee is established and operational, with a ToR and members representing key fisheries, research, and stakeholder groups. - Meetings once a year with documented outcomes related to NPOA coordination.	- DFAR, with engagement from NARA, relevant universities, research organisations, independent researchers, and other key stakeholders.	By Y2

3. AWARENESS, COMPLIANCE, & ENFORCEMENT			
3.1. <u>OUTREACH ON RESEARCH PRIORITIES</u>			
3.1.1 Communicate all research needs (including required outputs and data types and/or formats) with NARA, academic institutions (e.g., heads of fisheries/marine departments), and other relevant entities (e.g., private research organisations and independent researchers), with the request for them to results and recommendation with the DFAR.	- New research projects are developed and conducted, in alignment with the NPOA research priorities, and DFAR receive results and recommendations to inform better chondrichthyan management.	- DFAR - NARA - Universities - Research organisations - Independent researchers	Throughout
3.1.2 Encourage the provision of research grants to, or support research grant applications by, external research bodies or individuals (following due diligence and agreement to share research outcomes and recommendations), to meet the NPOA research needs.	- At least one research grant is received following support from the DFAR, for a project to meet NPOA priorities, with agreed data-sharing conditions.		Throughout
3.1.3 Encourage participation and presentation of scientific data at the IOTC WPEB.	- New chondrichthyan research findings are presented by Sri Lankan scientists at the IOTC WPEB.		Throughout
3.1.4 Provide an annual award to an individual and/or institution/department that provides the most useful data each year towards shark, ray, and chimaera management.	- Each year, one award is issued to a researcher or institution contributing valuable data for shark, ray, and chimaera management.		Annually

3.2. <u>OUTREACH FOR STAKEHOLDERS</u>			
3.1.1 Translate the core NPOA into Sinhala and Tamil, and share printed and digital versions in all three languages with fisheries offices, harbours, and online.	- The NPOA is available in all three languages at district fisheries offices, fishery harbours, and online for public access.	DFAR	In Y1
3.1.2 Conduct workshops at a provincial scale for fishery ADs and other stakeholders (fishers and traders) to explain key elements of the NPOA, regulatory updates (e.g., protected species, gear restrictions, IFS certification), and the roles of different stakeholder groups.	- Increased awareness among fisheries ADs and key stakeholders on the NPOA and, separately, regulatory updates. - IFS certificates are applied for and issued.		By Y2
3.1.3 Fisheries ADs to conduct presentations at major landing sites and harbours on current regulations for chondrichthyans, share best handling practices and reporting requirements, and receive feedback from fishers.	- Increased awareness among fishers, skippers, and traders on regulations. - An increase in available discard data from logbooks and crew-based observers, showing higher releases of live chondrichthyans.		Y2 - Y5
3.1.4 DFAR to conduct specific outreach to fisher representatives, trader associations, and exporters on the NPOA priorities.	- Increased awareness among key stakeholders on NPOA priorities and current/new regulations.		By Y2
3.1.5 Develop brochures, posters, species ID guides, and fact sheets in Sinhala, Tamil, and English, highlighting best practices, legal obligations, and conservation messages. Disseminate via district fisheries ADs.	- Outreach materials are visible across harbours and on board vessels. - An increase in records showing the live release of sharks, rays, and chimaeras.		By Y2
3.1.6 Use radio, newspapers, and social media to reach wider audiences with targeted messages about chondrichthyans conservation and the NPOA.	- Wider public awareness of chondrichthyan conservation and the NPOA priorities.		Y2 - Y5
3.1.7 Establish a stakeholder feedback mechanism through a	- An online stakeholder feedback form is launched and promoted, with responses		By Y1

structured online form where concerns can be raised, questions asked, or input provided.	monitored and reviewed regularly.		

3.3. <u>IMPROVE AND EXPAND COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT</u>			
3.3.1 Increase inspections at landing sites, harbours, onboard vessels at sea, and export hubs through regular and random inspections to check compliance with protected species lists, gear restrictions, non-retention measures (ETP kits), and product documentation.	- Inspections reveal a reduction in landing protected species and the possession of illegal gear (e.g., wire leaders, gillnets over 2.5 km,). - A reduction in the capture of sharks and rays on longlines is documented.	DFAR, *with support from SLC, SLN, SLCG, NARA.*	**Throughout**
3.3.2 Disseminate the NPOA and new regulations with stakeholders. Where necessary, develop and implement SOPs or an enforcement handbook (including visual identification tools, regulatory summaries, protocols for seizure, reporting, and inspection) to improve IUU monitoring, intelligence sharing, reporting, and enforcement.	- SLAWEN and the DFAR enforcement task force disseminate and utilise a new chondrichthyan enforcement handbook or SOP. - Increased coordination and communication between DFAR and enforcement agencies is documented. - A reduction in IUU fisheries is recorded.		**By Y2**
3.3.3 Establish, or integrate with an existing, centralised enforcement database to record violations, fines issued, identify repeat offenders, and monitor enforcement outcomes.	- A centralised enforcement database is maintained and repeat offenders are black-listed and prosecuted.		**By Y2**
3.3.4 Conduct targeted training for fisheries inspectors, enforcement authorities (SLC, SLN, SLCG) on protected sharks, rays, and chimaeras, updated regulations, safe release practices, and documentation checks.	- More enforcement officers can identify protected species and intercept IUU fisheries. - An increasing number of vessels have ETP release kits.		**By Y2**
3.3.5 Support the dissemination of the national shark and ray identification guidebook in all 3 languages.	- The national shark and ray identification guidebook is available at fishery harbours and with enforcement authorities. - Fishers, skippers, and vessel owners increase		**By Y3** **Annually**

3.3.6 Each year, award fishers, skippers, or vessel owners who have contributed significant amounts of data or demonstrated best practices in conservation and compliance.	data sharing and compliance. - A reduction in threatened chondrichthyan species being captured is recorded.		

Brief Background

Overview of Sharks, Rays, and Chimaeras in Sri Lanka and globally

SRI LANKA has an EEZ spanning 532,619 km^2 and available data confirms the presence of ~105 species of shark, ray, and chimaera. Of these, ~66% are threatened with extinction according to the global IUCN Red List.

Overfishing is the primary threat to these species. They are predominantly bycatch (longlines and gillnets), but some target fisheries do exist (deep-sea sharks for liver oil using handlines and bottom-set gillnets for rays). Discards, if occurring, are likely extremely low but mostly undocumented. Shark and ray meat is sold either fresh, or salted and dried, with preferences differing by region. Shark and ray fins, mobulid gill plates, skins (primarily from rays), oil from deep-sea shark livers, teeth, and jaws are exported.

As per the statistics from 2022 reported a total of 49,786 licensed fishing vessels and approximately 224,610 fishers. Fisheries are key for livelihoods and national food security. Primary target species include tuna, billfish, crustaceans, and reef fish. Landing statistics from 2021 show that sharks and rays comprise 2.6% (8,730 Mt) of total marine fish production (331,675 Mt). Shark finning is prohibited along with the retention of thresher sharks, oceanic whitetip sharks, and whale sharks. The release of pregnant sharks is encouraged, and there are projects underway providing fishers with tools and training to improve the handling and release of ETP species.

GLOBALLY, the situation is not too different. Over one-third of sharks, rays, and chimaeras are threatened with extinction, with overfishing being the primary threat affecting all threatened species. For some, in addition to overfishing, they also face challenges due to loss and degradation of habitat (31.2%, climate change (10.2%), and pollution (6.9%). Awareness and regulation of species have increased following their listings on conventions such as CITES and CMS, and to a lesser degree (usually through non-retention measures) at RFMOs.

Globally and nationally, there is an urgent need for proactive and cooperative management and conservation and sustainable management of sharks, rays, and chimaeras to ensure they are not exploited to the stage where they go functionally extinct or require the introduction of a non-retention measure.

Rationale for this revised NPOA

This is the third NPOA-Sharks developed by Sri Lanka in line with the FAO IPOA-Sharks. Many of the conservation and management challenges for sharks, rays, and chimaeras remain similar to when the previous two NPOAs were developed.

This new NPOA intends to be ambitious to ensure sharks, rays, and chimaeras are adequately managed and conserved. To ensure good outreach and understanding of the plan, the structure of the NPOA has been flipped around, with the core objectives and activities for the upcoming period brought to the front of the document, while the detailed supporting information and shark assessment report (SAR) are in the Annexes. As this NPOA focuses on realistic and practical outcomes that can be achieved within the timeframe laid out, it is recognised that not all requirements to fully manage and conserve sharks, rays, and chimaeras can be achieved within the duration of this new NPOA.

This NPOA also notes that many sharks, rays, and chimaeras have conservative life histories demonstrated by their slow growth rates, late maturity, and low fecundity. Therefore, management actions take this into account, recognising that mainstream fisheries management may not offer all the solutions and that in the absence of clear scientific advice, a precautionary approach to managing fisheries and other human impacts is necessary.

Pathway of revising NPOA

1. **Review of the previous NPOA**
   Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the previous National Plan of Action, identifying key achievements, implementation challenges, data gaps, and lessons learned.

2. **Drafting of the revised NPOA**
   Develop a revised draft based on updated scientific knowledge, national priorities, stakeholder inputs, and alignment with international commitments (e.g., IOTC, CITES, CMS).

3. **Stakeholder consultation and public comment**
   Engage relevant stakeholders—including government agencies, fisher representatives, scientists, universities, and research organisations—through targeted consultations. Facilitate a public comment period to ensure transparency and inclusive participation.

4. **Finalisation of the NPOA**
   Incorporate stakeholder feedback and finalise the revised NPOA through inter-agency coordination and endorsement by relevant authorities.

5. **Outreach and dissemination**
   Launch and distribute the final plan through official channels, awareness campaigns, and stakeholder networks to support implementation and promote compliance.

The precautionary principle

The precautionary principle is a risk management approach used in environmental and resource management when scientific information is incomplete or uncertain. It emphasises taking proactive action to prevent harm to species or ecosystems, even in the absence of full scientific certainty. In fisheries management, this principle supports implementing conservation measures, such as catch

limits, gear restrictions, non-retention measures, or area closures, to protect vulnerable species before significant population declines occur, thereby ensuring long-term sustainability.

This NPOA applies the precautionary principle to prevent species loss and to halt environmental degradation.

Summary of relevant organisations & international commitments

Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR)

DFAR is the national authority mandated under the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act (FARA) to manage, develop, and regulate all fisheries and aquatic resources within Sri Lanka's jurisdiction. It plays a central role in the formulation and implementation of national policies, regulatory frameworks, and data collection systems related to shark and ray fisheries. DFAR is also responsible for ensuring compliance with international fisheries and environmental agreements, facilitating monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS), and integrating ecosystem-based and precautionary approaches into fishery management.

National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA)

NARA is the principal scientific and technical institution for fisheries and aquatic resource management in Sri Lanka. It conducts research on fishery biology, stock assessments, and species distribution, and provides science-based advice to DFAR. NARA's role is critical in supporting data-driven decision-making for chondrichthyan management, including species identification, observer training, bycatch analysis, and the development of Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs) for CITES-listed species.

Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC)

The Department of Wildlife Conservation is the designated authority for the implementation and enforcement of the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance (FFPO) in Sri Lanka. It holds jurisdiction over the protection of threatened marine and terrestrial species, national parks, marine protected areas, and other conservation zones. DWC also contributes to international reporting obligations and species listing proposals under multilateral environmental agreements.

Sri Lanka Customs (SLC)

Sri Lanka Customs is responsible for enforcing laws related to the import and export of goods, including wildlife and fishery products. In the context of CITES implementation, Customs officers play a key role in detecting and preventing illegal trade of listed shark and ray products. Coordination between Customs, DFAR, and DWC is essential to ensure effective border control, permit verification, and prosecution of violations related to the international trade of protected elasmobranchs.

Sri Lanka Navy (SLN)

The Sri Lanka Navy supports maritime surveillance and law enforcement within national waters, including the detection and deterrence of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In collaboration with DFAR and the Coast Guard, the Navy contributes to Monitoring, Control, and

Surveillance (MCS) efforts and helps ensure compliance with national regulations, especially in offshore and deep-sea fisheries.

Sri Lanka Coast Guard (SLCG)

The Sri Lanka Coast Guard functions under the Ministry of Defence and plays a critical role in maritime law enforcement, including the prevention of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing within Sri Lanka's territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In coordination with DFAR and the Sri Lanka Navy, the Coast Guard contributes to Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) operations by conducting vessel inspections, boarding and patrolling activities, and ensuring compliance with national fisheries regulations. Its mandate supports the enforcement of conservation measures for sharks and rays, including finning bans, gear restrictions, and protected species regulations.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES is an international multilateral environmental agreement that regulates international trade in listed species through a permit-based system to ensure such trade is legal, sustainable, and traceable. Sri Lanka, as a CITES Party, is required to implement provisions for all CITES-listed elasmobranchs through science-based Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs), Legal Acquisition Findings (LAFs), and national enforcement mechanisms. The DWC serves as the Management Authority, while DFAR is a designated Scientific Authority for marine species.

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

CMS is an international multilateral environmental agreement that provides a legal framework for the conservation of migratory species and their habitats across national boundaries. As a CMS Party, Sri Lanka is committed to implementing conservation actions for elasmobranch species listed under Appendices I and II. This includes the adoption of species-specific action plans and the integration of migratory connectivity into national conservation planning. DWC is the national focal point for CMS.

The CMS Sharks Memorandum of Understanding (CMS Sharks MoU)

The CMS Sharks Memorandum of Understanding is a multilateral, non-legally binding instrument under CMS aimed at the conservation of migratory shark and ray species. Sri Lanka is a signatory to the MoU and participates in implementing its Conservation Plan, which promotes regional cooperation, data sharing, and the adoption of science-based measures for listed species. DWC is the national focal point for CMS.

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)

The IOTC is a Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO) with the mandate to manage tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean, including associated and dependent species such as sharks. Sri Lanka, as a Contracting Party, is obligated to implement IOTC resolutions pertaining to shark conservation and management, including those related to finning or non-retention bans, mandatory data reporting, observer coverage, and bycatch mitigation. DFAR is responsible for aligning national fisheries practices with IOTC compliance requirements and conservation objectives.