

DRAFT executive summary of the status of the oceanic whitetip shark resource

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BIOLOGY

The oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) is one of the most common large sharks in warm oceanic waters. It is typically found in shallower waters near oceanic islands.

Oceanic whitetip sharks are relatively large sharks and grow to up to 4 m. Females grow larger than males. The maximum weight reported for this species is 167.4 kg.

Both males and females mature at around 4 to 5 years old or about 1.8-1.9 m TL. Oceanic whitetip sharks are viviparous. Litter sizes range from 1-15 pups, with larger sharks producing more offspring. Each pup is approximately 60-65 cm at birth. In the south western Indian Ocean, whitetips appear to mate and give birth in the early summer, with a gestation period which lasts about one year. The reproductive cycle is believed to be biennial. The locations of the nursery grounds are not well known but they are thought to be in oceanic areas.

The population dynamics and stock structure of the oceanic whitetip shark in the Indian Ocean are not known.

FISHERIES

Oceanic whitetip sharks are often targeted by some semi-industrial, artisanal and recreational fisheries and are a bycatch of industrial fisheries (pelagic longline tuna and swordfish fisheries and purse seine fishery).

There is little information on the fisheries prior to the early 1970's, and some countries continue not to collect shark data while others do collect it but do not report it to IOTC. It appears that significant catches of sharks have gone unrecorded in several countries. Furthermore, many catch records probably under-represent the actual catches of sharks because they do not account for discards (i.e. do not record catches of sharks for which only the fins are kept or of sharks usually discarded because of their size or condition) or they reflect dressed weights instead of live weights.

Catches of oceanic whitetip sharks in the IOTC region are not given in this summary because their representativeness is highly uncertain.

FAO also compiles landings data on elasmobranchs, but the statistics are limited by the lack of species-specific data and data from the major fleets.

AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION FOR STOCK ASSESSMENT

There is little information available on oceanic whitetip shark biology and no information is available on stock structure.

Possible fishery indicators:

1. **Trends in catches:** The catch estimates for silky shark are highly uncertain as is their utility in terms of minimum catch estimates.
2. **Nominal CPUE Trends:** data not available
3. **Average weight in the catch by fisheries:** data not available
4. **Number of squares fished:** CE data not available

STOCK ASSESSMENT

No quantitative stock assessment has been undertaken by the IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch.

MANAGEMENT ADVICE

There is a paucity of information available on this species and this situation is not expected to improve in the short to medium term. There is no quantitative stock assessment or basic fishery indicators currently available for oceanic whitetip shark in the Indian Ocean therefore the stock status is highly uncertain.

Oceanic whitetip sharks are commonly taken by a range of fisheries in the Indian Ocean. Because of their life history characteristics – they are relatively long lived, mature at 4-5 years, and have relatively few offspring (<20 pups every two years), the oceanic whitetip shark is vulnerable to overfishing.