

GUITARFISHES

Support Proposal to include species of Rhinobatidae and other unlisted species of guitarfishes in Appendix II

Rhinobatidae, commonly known as guitarfishes, are a family of cartilaginous fish which are seriously imperiled. Currently 35 out of 37 species are in decline and 33 are classified as Endangered or Critically Endangered by the IUCN. Guitarfishes grow slowly, mature late, and have low fecundity. This makes them particularly vulnerable to overfishing and habitat degradation. This proposal is to list six Critically Endangered species of guitarfishes on Appendix II and, to bring the trade in these species and their parts and derivatives under effective control, to include all other species in the family Rhinobatidae that are not already listed in Appendix II as look-alikes.

Proponents of Listing

Israel, Kenya, Panama, and Senegal.

Distribution and Habitat

The guitarfish family is widely distributed around the globe. The *Actroteriobatus* genus can be found in the western Indian Ocean through the southeastern Atlantic, the *Pseudobatos* genus around the Americas, and the *Rhinobatos* in the Indo-western Pacific and eastern Atlantic. Generally, guitarfishes can be found in shallow waters over soft substrate as they are demersal benthic feeders. The family's wide range places their distribution within 110 countries.

At Risk of Extinction in the Wild

Populations of guitarfishes are particularly sensitive to declines from overharvesting due to their life history, slow growth, late maturity, and low fecundity. Additionally, females travel to shallow waters to give birth, which adds to their risk of being caught in fishing gear.



Costa Pinto 2019

COMMON NAME: Guitarfish

FAMILY: Rhinobatidae

IUCN STATUS: Out of 37 species, 23 Endangered and 10 Critically Endangered

MAJOR THREATS: International trade, domestic trade, habitat degradation, and fishing entanglement

RANGE: *Actroteriobatus*: western Indian Ocean through the southeastern Atlantic

Pseudobatos: around the Americas

Rhinobatos: Indo-western Pacific and eastern Atlantic

The IUCN classifies 23 species of guitarfishes as Endangered and ten as Critically Endangered. This proposal is to list six Critically Endangered species (*Actroteriobatus variegatus*, *Pseudobatos horkelii*, *Rhinobatos albomaculatus*, *R. irvinei*, *R. rhinobatos*, and *R. schlegelii*), but due to the similarity in appearance of parts and derivatives in trade, it proposes listing all species of the family on Appendix II that are currently unlisted. The six species at the core of this proposal are primarily imperiled due to overharvesting for trade, both domestic and international.

Domestic Exploitation

Guitarfishes are overexploited in legal fisheries as well as through high levels of illegal and unregulated fishing (Leeney & Quayson 2022; Moore 2017; de-Franco *et al.* 2012). They are also caught as bycatch due to entanglement in fishing gear such as demersal trawls and gillnets (Wosnick *et al.* 2018). Their meat is often consumed domestically whereas fins and skins are almost always exported internationally.

 <p>RHINOBATIDAE FAMILY: RHINOBATIDAE RANGE: INDIAN OCEAN, PACIFIC OCEAN, ATLANTIC OCEAN</p>	THREATS:	SPECIES PROPOSED FOR LISTING:
	 INTERNATIONAL TRADE	Appendix II in accordance with Article II, paragraph 2(a) of the Convention
	 DOMESTIC EXPLOITATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Acroteriobatus variegatus</i> - <i>Pseudobatos horkelii</i> - <i>Rhinobatos albomaculatus</i> - <i>Rhinobatos irvinei</i> - <i>Rhinobatos rhinobatos</i> - <i>Rhinobatos schlegelii</i>
	 HABITAT DEGRADATION	Appendix II, in accordance with Article II, paragraph 2(b)
	 FISHING ENTANGLEMENT	- All other species in the family Rhinobatidae

International Trade

There is a large network of domestic and international trade in guitarfish meat, fins, and skins, but it has often been poorly recorded. Fins from this family are highly sought after for shark fin soup. Markets in Hong-Kong SAR and Guangzhou, China specifically sell guitarfish fins in a special category and sell them at a higher price than shark fins.

Habitat Degradation and Loss

Guitarfishes are also threatened by habitat degradation and loss. Due to their preference for shallow water, they are especially vulnerable to offshore development and overfishing. The sandy substrate that they rely on for habitat is also rapidly degrading in parts of their range.

Support this Proposal

Management of guitarfish fisheries is urgently needed (Leeney & Quayson 2022). Guitarfishes are threatened by the international trade of their fins, meat, and skins; domestic exploitation; fishing entanglement; and habitat degradation. These compounding threats put them at significant risk and have caused dramatic population declines over the past decades, particularly for the six Critically Endangered species that are the subject of the proposal. Due to the IUCN status of these six species and the similarity of appearance concerns for parts and derivatives for the remainder of the family that is not currently listed on Appendix II, the entire family should be listed under Appendix-II in accordance with Article II 2(a) and Annex 1, paragraph C of Res. Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP17) and Article II 2(b).

References:

This fact sheet is a summary of the proposal to include the guitarfish family, Rhinobatidae, under Appendix II of CITES. The full proposal can be found on the CITES webpage:

https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/19/prop/as_received/E-Rhinobatidae_spp.pdf

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De-Franco, B. et al. (2012). Illegal trade of the guitarfish *Rhinobatos horkelii* on the coasts of central and southern Brazil: genetic identification to aid conservation. *Aquatic Conservation* 22(2): 272-276.

Kyne et al. 2020. The thin edge of the wedge: Extremely high extinction risk in wedgefishes and giant guitarfishes. *Aquatic Conservation*. 30 (7): 1337-1361.

Leeney, R. & E. Quayson (2022). Short note: An assessment of the status of sawfishes and of guitarfish landings in artisanal fisheries in Ghana. *Aquatic Conservation* 32(7): 1217-1224.

Moore, A. (2017). Are guitarfishes the next sawfishes? Extinction risk and an urgent call for conservation action. *Endangered Species Research* 34: 75-88.

Wosnick, N. et al. (2018). Impacts of fisheries on elasmobranch reproduction: high rates of abortion and subsequent maternal mortality in the shortnose guitarfish. *Animal Conservation* 22(2): 198-206.