



IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group



Conservation Success Stories

**Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs).
Two years of global impact**



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Two years of global impact

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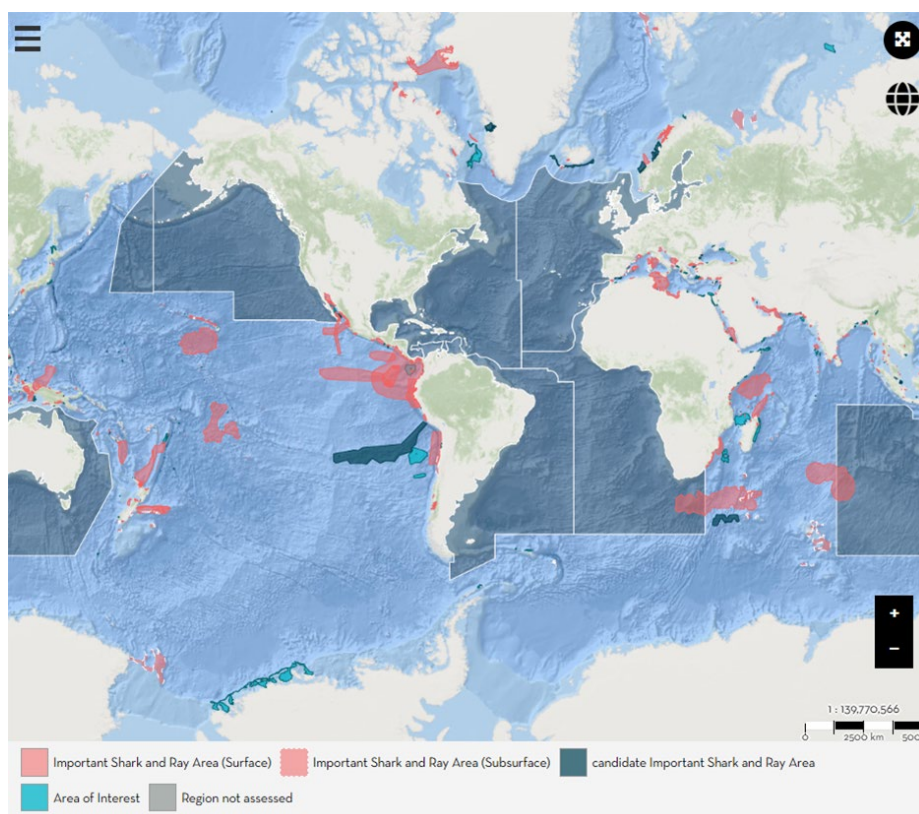
THREAT ADDRESSED

Current protected areas are often ineffective at conserving sharks, rays, and chimaeras because of our lack of understanding of the critical habitats they utilize. The Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) project is changing that and delineating these critical habitats around the world.

TARGET

Implement Important Shark and Ray Areas project. (T-027)

**ISRAs
identified
for
over
300
species
of
sharks,
rays,
and
chimaeras**



SUCCESS LEVEL

Highly successful

Success category:

Policy and legislation improvements

Success subcategory: **New policies implemented**

Success story



REASONS FOR SUCCESS

As the first global project mapping critical habitats for sharks, rays, and chimaeras, the Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) initiative is highly successful. These areas protect biodiversity by covering regions where species breed, feed, or migrate. Safeguarding these hotspots strengthens conservation management and supports the Global Biodiversity Framework's Target 3—to protect 30% of oceans by 2030, promoting sustainable fisheries.

The Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) project aims to enhance conservation of sharks, rays, and chimaeras through a systematic place-based approach. ISRAs are discrete, three-dimensional habitat portions important for one or more shark species, delineated and potentially managed for conservation.

Developed in 2022, the ISRAs approach is the first expert-driven global classification to delineate critical shark habitats. ISRAs complement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs), the IUCN Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), and Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs). These delineations are considered at CBD Conference of the Parties meetings to highlight areas for achieving Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

Since its launch, the ISRAs project organised eight regional workshops, covering over 70% of global waters. Following each workshop, ISRA proposals are peer-reviewed and published in a compendium. As of January 2025, 868 contributors have supported delineating 592 ISRAs from Central and South American Pacific (65 ISRAs), Mediterranean and Black Seas (65 ISRAs), Western Indian Ocean (125 ISRAs), Asia (122 ISRAs), Polar Waters (36 ISRAs), and New Zealand and Pacific Islands (179 ISRAs); the South American Atlantic and Inland waters workshop ISRAs are under review. ISRAs were identified for over 300 sharks, rays, and chimaera species. Workshops have strengthened regional capacity, collaboration, and knowledge exchange. Feedback has been highly positive (see the New Zealand and Pacific Islands workshop).

Regional compendiums provide policymakers with jurisdictional-level information and are accessible online, along with the eAtlas, with downloadable factsheets.

ISRAs are being integrated into area-based management approaches worldwide, guiding marine spatial planning in the Maldives and the Philippines, and shaping proposals for high seas protected areas (e.g., the Costa Rica Thermal Dome ISRA overlaps with the Costa Rica Thermal Dome EBSA). Several ISRAs are already featured in national and regional initiatives, including the Philippines' Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, Madagascar's Nosy Be KBA, and the Pacific Islands' marine species programme.

ISRAs have been recognised by Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and Signatories of the Sharks Memorandum of Understanding (Sharks MoU). Decisions adopted in 2023 and 2024 request Parties to consider ISRAs for spatial planning and conservation action to help implement Targets 1 and 3 of the GBF, through National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

ISRAs are being prioritised in new conservation initiatives supported by the Shark Conservation Fund and the Save Our Seas Foundation.

■ ALEXANDRA MORATA

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

<https://sharkrayareas.org/resources/scientific-publications/>
<https://sharkrayareas.org/e-atlas/>



Vulnerable Northern River Shark,
(*Glyphis garricki*)
Photo: Grant Johnson

Interviews about human wildlife
interactions with local inhabitants
Photo: Kiran Thapa Magar

Vicuña management by Cooperativa
Agroganadera de Santa Catalina and Comunidad
Aborígen Atu Shapi de Morritos.
Santa Catalina, Jujuy Province, Argentina
Photo: Yanina Arzamendia

Story photo credits

Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) eAtlas
Photo: IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group

Community songbird monitoring and
protection, Indonesia
Photo: Asian Songbird Trade SG archives

Cacti from genera *Copiapoa* and *Eriosyce*
confiscated in Italy and repatriated to Chile in 2021
Photo: Andrea Cattabriga