

WE CAN'T MISS THIS MAJOR OPPORTUNITY FOR SHARK CONSERVATION.

The Coral Sea, east of the Great Barrier Reef, is one of the world's last ocean areas where sharks still dominate in a healthy and abundant sea. It is considered a pelagic biodiversity hotspot and one of the few that could be effectively protected in a large marine sanctuary. We have to act now to ask for its protection.



CORAL SEA SHARKS

Australia's Coral Sea is one of the world's last great tropical ocean ecosystems and its protection represents the chance to create a safe haven for sharks.

Scientists estimate that up to 90% of big fish (including sharks) have been lost from our oceans over the past 50 years due to unsustainable fishing. The Coral Sea is considered to be one of the last remaining special places where healthy populations still abound.

At least ten species of pelagic sharks move through the Coral Sea including the shortfin mako, bronze whaler, oceanic whitetip, hammerhead, tiger, and great white sharks. The Coral Sea is also home to a rare whale shark aggregation and 52 species of deepwater sharks and rays, 18 of which are unique to the area.

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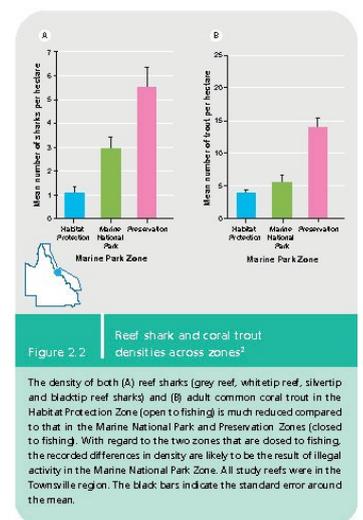
Sharks play a vital role in the health of our ocean. Due to the deeply interconnected food webs of our oceans, their removal from the marine food chain may lead to major changes in the structure and health of marine ecosystems.

The main pressure on sharks in the Coral Sea is commercial fishing with over 100 tonnes of shark taken as longline "bycatch" each year. The carcasses are landed and finned, and the fins are exported to Asia. A recent study on the economic value of sharks showed that each shark had a lifetime value of \$1.9 million in dive tourism versus a value of only \$108 if sold in pieces for their fins and meat. Almost 18,000 times less!

There is strong evidence that the shark populations of the Great Barrier Reef are rapidly declining with grey reef sharks reduced to only 3% of natural populations on some fished reefs. Whitetip reef sharks had declined around 80% on fished reefs also. Small sanctuaries or networks of sanctuaries cannot offer sharks the same protection as large scale marine sanctuaries.

The previous Coral Sea Marine Reserve with 500,000 square kilometers fully protected was a first for Australia in protecting an area large enough to protect a significant portion of the home ranges of pelagic species like sharks. However, this major achievement is now at risk. Despite strong science and overwhelming community support the Abbott Government is reviewing the level of protection in the Coral Sea. This casts a shadow of doubt over the future of its sharks and other incredible marine life.

A study conducted in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park reveals that shark populations are heavily affected by fishing but benefit greatly from the establishment of sanctuaries (areas closed to fishing).



For more information on the campaign to Protect our Coral Sea go to: <http://www.protectourcoralsea.org.au>

