**What needs to be done?**

1. Curb illegal trade in shark species that are protected under the wildlife law.

2. Regulate trade in shark species that can be traded by implementing sustainable policies to ensure the trade is not a threat to their conservation in India. This will also help to secure the long-term livelihood of the dependent fishermen communities.

**How will TRAFFIC help?**

Globally, TRAFFIC has a significant role in helping curb illegal shark trade and to ensure that legal trade is kept within sustainable limits through providing technical expertise to fisheries management authorities. In 2003, TRAFFIC published a study into the Deep: Implementing CITES measures for commercially valuable sharks and manta rays, examining how implementation of trade controls through CITES regulations can ensure that seven protected species of sharks and manta rays are only sourced sustainably and legally before entering international trade (http://www.traffic.org/fisheries-projects/traffic_pub_fisheries.pdf).

TRAFFIC brings to India its years of experience in this field and has already begun working with the key players in the fisheries sector to adopt sustainable practices for shark catching and trade. TRAFFIC’s immediate project in India includes assessing India’s shark fishery and associated trade dynamics in order to provide a Shark Assessment Report (SAR – as recommended by FAO, including examination of shark landings, catches, management and knowledge of species, policies and status of stocks) and also make recommendations for implementing a national plan of action for sharks (NPOA-Sharks) in line with the FAO International Plan of Action (IPOA).

TRAFFIC will engage with the fishermen communities to create awareness about the shark and ray species that are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of India, 1972. It will promote responsible fisheries of the CITES regulated sharks and rays species for a sustainable future.

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**SHARKS IN THE SOUP:**

An overview of shark trade in India

Growth in international demand for shark fins and other shark products has been the main driver of shark fisheries operating out of India. This has raised serious concerns about the future of many shark species targeted by these fisheries.
India is rich in natural resources. Surrounded by seas such as the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, it provides a range of commercially important fishes and marine animals. Chondrichthyans, comprising of sharks, rays and skates, include a number of commercially fished species found along the Indian coast. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), India is the world’s second biggest shark catching nation. Between the years 2000-2008, the shark catches averaged 74,000 tonnes per annum.

Reportedly 73 million sharks are killed each year globally and somewhere between 50 to 80 percent of the global trade passes through Hong Kong where shark fin soup is considered a delicacy and consumed as a sign of wealth and also in other parts of East Asia. Globally, around 30 percent of shark species are threatened or near-threatened with extinction.

More than 79 species of shark have been sighted in Indian waters and over 20 of these are caught commercially.

**The crisis:**

India has been catching such large volumes of sharks over a long period that now there are serious concerns about the sustainability of these catches given the biology of the shark species involved and lack of data to reflect their population status. Carcharhiniformes, the largest order of sharks, are most exploited in commercial fish trade in India.

Demand for highly valued shark products drives international trade and has been recognized as a serious threat to the survival of shark species worldwide. Sharks are caught for their meat, leather, liver oil and their cartilage. However, it is the demand for their fins, used in Chinese cuisine, that is currently driving the international shark trade.

Since much of the trade in shark products is largely unregulated, intensive hunting for sharks is becoming environmentally and economically unsustainable. Many species traded are considered Critically Endangered while data on some populations are lacking.

Trawl operations, gill net operations, hooks & lines and long lining by mechanized and non-mechanized vessels are used for catching sharks in India.

**Legal status:**

- **The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** prohibits hunting, trade and any other forms of exploitation of 10 species of sharks, rays and sawfish. These species are Narrow Sawfish Anamousa cuspis; Pundiaberry Shark Carcharhinus armadorensis; Ganges Shark Carcharhinus gangesicus; Suntarclaw Shark Carcharhinus gangesicus; Ganges Whitetip Himantura fluvitans; Large-toothed Sawfish Pristis microdon; Longcomb Sawfish or Green Sawfish Pristis zieneri; Giant Guitarfish Rhizoprionodon dilepis; Porcupine Ray Urogymnus asperrimus and Whale Shark Rhizodus typus. The common names of the species may vary from region to region.

- The international trade in sharks is further regulated through **CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)** to which India has been a Party since 1977. In 2015, five species of sharks—the Oceanic Whitetip Carcharhinus longimanus, Smooth Hammerhead Sphyrna lewini, Great Hammerhead Shark Sphyrna mokarran, Smooth Hammerhead Shark Sphyrna zygaena and the Portgualish Shark Lamna nasus and two species of manta rays*Manta birostris* were listed in Appendix II of CITES. This means commercial international trade in these species must be regulated and require appropriate permits and documentation. All of these species, except the Portgualish Shark are also found in Indian coastal waters.

- The Ministry of Environment and Forests in India has also issued a "fish naturally attached" policy, requiring fisheries to land sharks with their fins attached. In an effort to protect endangered sharks as well as better monitor how many and what species were being caught, India announced a ban on the practice of shark finning. Many sharks were being de-finned on-board vessels, and their bodies disposed of at sea, identifying the species from the fin alone without the corresponding carcass was extremely difficult. Fishermen violating the law face seven years in prison.