

PRESS RELEASE

Threatened species of sharks, rays and skates should be protected: The National Cartilaginous Fish Conservation Action Plan has been published!

Turkish Marine Research Foundation (TUDAV) has publicly shared the National Cartilaginous Fish Conservation Action Plan for threatened species of sharks, rays and skates. The proposed action plan also suggests the protection of the threatened manta species whose catch have created great public reaction, recently.

On March 11, 2017, according to the news serviced by Anadolu Agency, thirty individuals of *Mobula* sp. were captured off the Mediterranean Sea and landed in the Izmir Harbor aiming to sell the fish to Greece by a dealer. On March 14, 2017, according to the news serviced by Ihlas News Agency (IHA), fourteen of them were sold to a fisherman in Istanbul for exhibition.

Fishing, landing, display and/or trade of this fish are restricted by international treaties that Turkey is party to. However, unfortunately the regulation was not included in the Notifications of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock of Turkish Republic regulating the Commercial (No 4/1) and Amateur (No. 4/2) Fisheries (No: 2016/35, 36), so the fishermen does not aware of the restriction and the protection status of the species.

The Manta individuals were caught as by-catch by a purse seiner targeting a commercially high-value fish, such as tuna. Although their low commercial value, fisherman still prefer to market the mantas when caught, instead of releasing. Although the studies on the survival rate of post-released individuals are very scarce, the current studies indicate that handling, boarding or removing fish from the water greatly decrease the survival rate; however releasing them directly from the brailer of the purse seine is considered as the best practice.

The incident regarding the catch, sale and display of the manta individuals caused a great reaction of the public, the national and international NGOs and concerned academicians. Turkish Marine Research Foundation (TUDAV) has been following up the incident since the first day and has spent intensive efforts to inform, act on and cooperate with all relevant institutions. However, no results could be obtained due to the indifference and insensitivity of the related institutions.

One day before this sad incident, on March 10, to form the National Cartilaginous Fish Conservation Action Plan, our foundation organized a day-long workshop with the participation of 5 universities, 4 NGO representatives, an expert from the related ministry, a municipal representative an a fisherman who is the head of a fishing co-operative. The restriction of the catch of twelve cartilaginous species is proposed in the draft of the National Action Plan in addition to the five species that already takes part in the notifications regulating the commercial and amateur fisheries. The action plan can be accessed from the link below.

In spite of the insensitivity of the relevant institutions, it is evident that the reaction of the public has created awareness for the protection of the cartilaginous fish. Last year, TUDAV suggested the restriction of the catch of the threatened cartilaginous species to enter to the notifications of fisheries; but unfortunately rejected for all except for one species. TUDAV will continue to follow the actions that should be taken by the relevant institutions and steps taken to eliminate legal gaps at the national level. To follow-up at the international level, TUDAV will also support newly released IUCN Global Conservation Strategy for Devil and Manta Rays.

More about the Mobula species

The species belonging to the genus *Mobula*, called as Kulaklıfolya, Şeytanbalığı (Devilfish) and Manta in Turkish. They are oceanic and pelagic cartilaginous fish species found over the continental shelves. They exhibit ovoviparity (aplacental viviparity) and giving birth to only one or two pups per gestation period. They are in the "IUCN Red List of Threatened Species" and fishing, landing, display and trade are restricted by various international, regional, and national legislations.

Among them, CMS Appendix I & II (2014), European Union (2015), IATTC (2015), and CITES (2016) are the international protections that restricts fishing and/or trade of multiple species of the genus (*Mobula* spp.). Additionally, *M. mobular* is listed in GFCM (2015), Barcelona Convention SPA/BD Protocol Annex II (2001) and Bern Convention Appendix II (2001). Turkey is party to CITES and GFCM and the Barcelona and Bern Conventions.

More about TUDAV

Turkish Marine Research Foundation (TUDAV) is carrying out scientific studies in the Turkish seas for 20 years and the efforts to protect Turkey's marine life and biological diversity is one of our top priorities. At the same time, TUDAV carries out long-term studies on stranded dead and wounded sea mammals and has signed joint projects with international organizations such as ACCOBAMS, UNEP, MedPAN and CIESM.