

## Sawfishes All species (family Pristidae)

Large-tooth Sawfish *Pristis pristis*

Small-tooth Sawfish *Pristis pectinata*

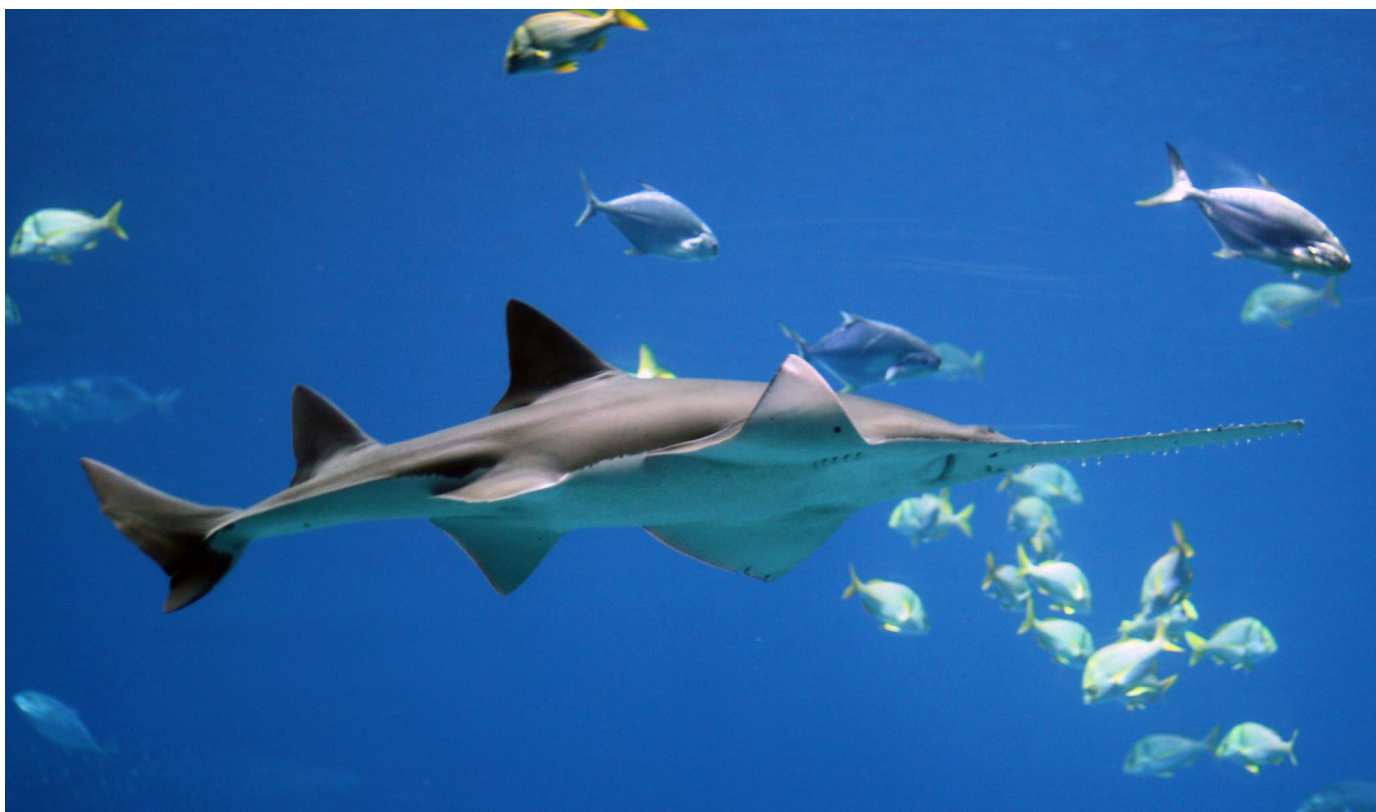
Dwarf Sawfish *Pristis clavata*

Green Sawfish *Pristis zijsron*

Narrow Sawfish *Anoxypristis cuspidata*

**Proposed action** Inclusion on CMS Appendices I & II

**Proponents** Kenya



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### Overview

The large, warm-water rays known as Sawfishes (family Pristidae) are the world's most endangered elasmobranchs (sharks and rays). Individuals from remaining populations cross national boundaries and are at great risk due to the lack of coordinated protections and the degradation of key habitats, exacerbated by the species' low productivity, tendency for entanglement in fishing nets, and persistent economic value. Inclusion in CMS Appendices I & II can facilitate enhanced national, regional, and international safeguards, as well as restoration of migratory pathways, thereby improving the outlook for these exceptionally imperiled species on a global scale.



## Biology and Distribution

Characterized by long, flat, tooth-studded snouts (“rostra”), Sawfish can reach more than seven meters in length. These high-order predators feed mainly on bony fishes and invertebrates. Like most elasmobranchs, Sawfish are inherently vulnerable to overexploitation due to slow growth, late maturity (up to 10 years), and relatively small number of offspring (1–20 pups probably once a year or every other year).

Sawfish are found in warm coastal waters, and in some cases rivers and lakes. They were once found in 90 tropical and subtropical countries. Serious constriction in range, however, has resulted from population depletion. Historical data, particularly from Central America, West Africa, and the Indo-Pacific, indicate that these inherently migratory species regularly crossed national boundaries – patterns that should resume upon population recovery.



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## Population Status and Threats

All Sawfish species are classified as *Endangered* or *Critically Endangered* on the IUCN Red List. Local extinction is assumed in many regions where sightings have not been reported for decades. Sawfish rostra are easily entangled in many types of fishing gear, particularly trawls and gillnets. Fishing mortality presents the greatest risk to remaining sawfish populations. Destruction of key habitats, such as mangrove stands and seagrass beds, also poses a significant threat to the species' survival.

## Economic and Cultural Significance

Sawfish are popular attractions for public aquariums, as well as some national parks and dive sites. They feature prominently in folklore from Panama to Papua New Guinea, and are particularly important to cultures in West Africa, where they symbolize justice and appear on regional currency. Sawfish rostra are universally valued

as curios, and have been used to treat ailments in many countries; a variety of sawfish parts have been used in traditional Chinese medicine. Sawfish meat is consumed in some places, while sawfish fins are exceptionally valuable for shark fin soup in Asia. Sawfish used to be targeted for these uses, but are now taken primarily as incidental catch.

## Conservation Measures

Sawfish are protected to varying degrees in just 16 of 90 historical range states: Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Qatar, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, United Arab Emirates, and the United States. International trade in Sawfish has been essentially banned through listing of all species on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

## Expert Advice

The Sawfish listing proposal has been endorsed by the CMS Scientific Council's Fish Working Group. In 2007, based on a review by the IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG), the Scientific Council determined that all Sawfish species meet the criteria for listing in both CMS Appendices.

Because of their dire status, Sawfish were the subject of the IUCN SSG's first global conservation strategy, which was released in June 2014 and includes CMS listing among its objectives.

## CALL TO ACTION

Strict protections for Sawfish and their habitats are clearly justified and in most places urgently needed to prevent species extinction. Listing all Sawfish species under CMS Appendices I & II could:

- bolster and encourage national recovery efforts;
- facilitate regional cooperation toward protection of shared populations and key habitats;
- complement the international commercial trade ban under CITES Appendix I, and
- underscore international commitment to saving these exceptional species.

**We urge CMS Parties to support inclusion of all Sawfish species on CMS Appendices I & II at CoP11**

## References

Information in this fact sheet is based on the listing proposal, the relevant Red List assessments, and:

Dulvy, N.K., Davidson, L.N.K, Kyne, P.M., Simpfendorfer, C.A., Harrison, L.R., Carlson, J.K. & Fordham, S.V. In press. Ghosts of the coast: global extinction risk and conservation of sawfishes. *Aquatic Conservation – Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*.

IUCN Shark Specialist Group/Convention on Migratory Species 2007. *Review of Chondrichthyan Fishes*. CMS Technical Report Series 15. IUCN and UNEP/ CMS Secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

Harrison, L.R. & Dulvy, N.K. 2014. Sawfish: A Global Strategy for Conservation. International Union for the Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission's Shark Specialist Group, Vancouver, Canada.