

OUR PACIFIC OCEAN, OUR STORIES

Sharks in the Pacific media



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Sharks and reef fish, Solomon Islands © Stuart Chape

There are many reasons as to why sharks are important for our Pacific islands region, and if you haven't developed news items about them before, this factsheet may be a catalyst to do so – or it may help provide you with information if you are developing a news item that touches upon sharks in the Pacific

Why do we need to save our sharks?

Sharks seem to have a bad reputation, yet like all species within an ecosystem we need our sharks as they help maintain the health of the marine life in the ocean, including the population of commercially important fish species.

Our coral reefs in particular benefit from a healthy shark population as sharks maintain a balance in the marine food chain.

Along with their crucial role, contributing to our ecosystems, sharks are also important to the economy. Sharks are of more value alive, than dead. A study in Palau showed that an individual reef shark is estimated to be valued at USD 1.9 million over its lifetime to the tourism industry, and the shark diving industry contributed USD 42.2 million to the Fijian economy in 2011.

Yet aside from this, sharks are also of cultural importance to Pacific Islanders. You can see them featured in our Pacific island legends, proverbs and songs.





Did you know that sharks are threatened with extinction?

Between 63 million to 273 million sharks are killed each year in commercial fisheries mainly to meet the high demand of shark fins.

One-third of species found in the global fin trade are threatened with extinction. It has been estimated that more than 20 million blue sharks are caught annually and are the dominant species in the global shark fin trade.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimates that 54% of sharks, rays and their relatives are threatened or near threatened with extinction.

What is the Pacific doing to save sharks?

When it comes to protecting sharks, the Pacific islands have shone a beacon of leadership on the world stage.

The EEZ's (Economic Exclusive Zones) of Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Samoa have been legally declared shark sanctuaries.

This means a total estimated area of 17 million sq. km has been established as shark sanctuaries in our Pacific islands!

In 2016 Fiji, supported by Samoa and Palau led the successfully listing of nine species of mobula rays on the Appendix II under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. They also supported the listing of thresher sharks, silky sharks and the nautilus that were all adopted for Appendix II listing in 2016.

In 2017, the Governments of Samoa and Sri Lanka successfully lobbied to place blue sharks on Appendix II under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals to help ensure their sustainability.

Country	EEZ Size	Sanctuary Declared
Palau	608,289 km ²	2009
Marshall Islands	2 million km ²	2011
Cook Islands	2 million km ²	2012
French Polynesia	4.8 million km ²	2012
New Caledonia	1.2 million km ²	2013
Federated States of Micronesia	3 million km ²	2015
Kiribati	3.4 million km ²	2015
Samoa	128,000 km ²	2018



Telling our Pacific Stories

As a member of the Pacific media, you can also play a role in saving our Pacific sharks. Your role in communicating with the Pacific island people is vital, especially in informing communities so they know why we should be caring for our environment including our marine species.

Some tips for consideration:

Sharks are magnificent creatures, and they play a significant role in our Pacific Ocean's biodiversity, as well as our Pacific culture and heritage. Tracing their role within Pacific cultures may make for interesting feature stories.

Linking it all together. As a Pacific media worker you may highlight and report about environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, and habitat loss. How about linking the impacts of these issues with marine species, such as sharks?

Cinema and dramatisation of shark encounters have given sharks a bad reputation, but the global average of shark deaths per year is six.¹ This, in contrast with the number of sharks killed by humans annually, paints an extremely troublesome picture. By writing positive stories about sharks, and highlighting the threats and impacts they face, you can give a voice to a voiceless creature.

Telling the good stories. Sometimes people want to hear the good news, how about developing stories that encourage the preservation of ecosystems through positive eco-tourism, highlighting the beauty of our sharks and our ocean. Highlight any communities, individuals or groups who are calling for action against the shark-fin industry and other harmful human activities.

¹ Florida Museum. International Shark Attack File. 2019. <https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/shark-attacks/yearly-worldwide-summary/>