

Fisheries or Biodiversity?

[Link to Workshop Participant Photos](#)

Are fishes a component of biodiversity, whose management should therefore fall within the remit of wildlife protection treaties, or do they fall exclusively under the competence of fisheries management organisation? This issue is repeatedly raised during debate at meetings of biodiversity conventions considering whether to list threatened or declining fish species on their appendices, and at the meetings of fisheries managers anxious to safeguard their traditional role.

Thirty shark experts from eight Mediterranean countries, Belgium, the UK, USA, Mexico and Canada gathered in San Marino from 29 September to 1 October in order to assess the status of the Mediterranean chondrichthyan* fauna. Initial discussions on the first day covered opportunities for shark management and conservation in the Mediterranean Sea and the identification of priority actions for the conservation of this vulnerable group of fishes.

Many experts raised their concerns regarding a reservation on the adoption of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan for the Conservation of Cartilaginous Fishes taken during the meeting earlier this month of the MAP Focal Points. The reservation focuses on concerns that the MAP, a biodiversity instrument, is trespassing into issues that are the competence of fisheries management bodies. While the Action Plan has been under development for a year, this reservation comes just two months before the adoption of the Action Plan by the contracting parties in their Ordinary Meeting in Catania, Italy, in November 2003.

At the same time, the European Community is moving to integrate fisheries and environmental policies to protect the marine environment and ensure the sustainability of fish stocks and fisheries, and has recognised the desirability of an ecosystem approach to fisheries, environmental protection, and conservation and management measures. "It is recommended that such integrated Policy is exported to other nearby regions, and is also promoted on the global level, especially when shared and transboundary stocks, or stocks in the high seas are involved. This is particularly important in semi-enclosed seas as the Mediterranean" said Sarah Fowler, co-chair of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group.

The shark experts are now assessing the threatened status of the 86 species of sharks and rays that occur in the Mediterranean Sea, by applying the internationally recognised IUCN Red List criteria. The preliminary results of the workshop will be communicated shortly, enabling species of particular conservation concern to be identified and targeted for conservation action.

* *The Chondrichthyans are the cartilaginous fishes; the sharks, rays and chimaeras.*