

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Thirtieth meeting of the Animals Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 16-21 July 2018

Proposals for possible consideration at CoP18

WEDGEFISHES AND GUITARFISHES

1. This document has been submitted by Pakistan in relation to agenda item 30.*
2. Committee Members and observers are encouraged to send their comments directly to the Management Authority of Pakistan at umeed.khalid@gmail.com and samar_baloch@yahoo.com (copy to naeemashrafraja@yahoo.com and mmoazzamkhan@gmail.com).

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WEDGEFISHES AND GUITARFISHES

Proposed action: Inclusion in CITES Appendix II

Proponent: Pakistan

Wedgefishes and guitarfishes belonged to order Rhinopristiformes containing shovelnose rays, sawfishes, guitarfishes, wedgefishes and allied group. Sawfishes, being threatened, are already included in CITES Appendix-I. Giant guitarfishes (Family Glaucostegidae), wedgefishes (Family Rhinidae) and guitarfishes (Family Rhinobatidae) are found in tropical, subtropical and temperate waters worldwide. These bottom dwelling species reach moderate to large size and are once important commercial species in many coastal nations but because of overfishing their population has substantially decreased. There seems to be no aimed fisheries for this important group of elasmobranchs but mainly caught by bottom set gears including trawls, gillnets and traps. There is no specific market for these species, however, it is marketed fresh, wings and frozen and exported as well as fins are prized in sharkfin trade.

Although detailed information about their status is not available but because of their restricted distribution in coastal habitat, limited life history characteristics, susceptibility to capture in various gears and demand of their fins in sharkfin trade make them susceptible to overfishing. Habitat degradation in coastal area, including inshore nursery areas, from human activities (fisheries, pollution, coastal impacts) are likely affecting this species given its inshore occurrence.

There is limited or no information about their catches in various countries, however, in Pakistan data of guitarfishes which includes all wedgefishes and guitarfishes was recorded and it observed to be fluctuating between 2018 m. tons (in year 2000) and 403 m. tons (in the year 2011). There is no specific or aimed fisheries for wedgefishes or guitarfishes but these are landed as part of bycatch of bottom trawl (both shrimp and fish trawls) and bottom set gillnets. In comparison to other elasmobranchs, the meat of wedgefishes or guitarfishes are considered to be of superior quality and fetches high prices. Fins from large specimens of guitarfishes and wedgefishes is also marketed and exported to China.

Species Known from Pakistan and their status

Family Rhinobatidae (Guitarfishes)

Rhinobatos annandalei (Annandale's guitarfish) Data Deficient (DD)

Rhinobatos lionotus Smoothback guitarfish Data Deficient (DD)

Acroteriobatus salalah (Salalah guitarfish) Data Deficient (DD)

Acroteriobatus blochii (Bloch's guitarfish) Least Concern (LC)

Family Glaucostegidae (Giant guitarfishes)

Glaucostegus granulatus (Sharpnose guitarfish) Vulnerable (VU) (A2bd+3d+4d)

Glaucostegus halavi (Forsk., 1775) Halavi's guitarfish Data Deficient (DD)

Glaucostegus obtusus (Widenose guitarfish) Not Evaluated (NE)

Glaucostegus thouin (Clubnose guitarfish) Vulnerable (VU) (A2abd+3bd+4abd)

Glaucostegus typus (Giant shovelnose ray) Vulnerable (VU) (A2bd+3bd+4bd)

Family Rhinidae (Wedgefishes)

Rhynchobatus djiddensis (Giant guitarfish) Vulnerable (VU) (A2bd+3bd+4bd)

Rhynchobatus australiae Bottlenose wedgefish Vulnerable (VU) (A2bd+3bd+4bd)

Rhina ancylostoma (Bowmouth guitarfish) Vulnerable (VU) (A2bd+3bd+4bd)

Rational for Placing Wedgefishes and Guitarfishes on CITES Appendix-II

Wedgefishes and guitarfishes used to be quite abundant in commercial landings along the coast of Pakistan, however, catches of these species have substantially decreased. Almost all the species are disappearing from the landings and now hardly seen. The fins and wings are regularly being exported increasing the demand in local market. Habitat degradation, indiscriminate fishing including that of juveniles, fishing in shallow coastal waters which acts as nursery grounds has seriously affected the population of wedgefishes and guitarfishes. Demand for their fins and wings in the international market may seriously affect the population of these species. It is evident that out of 12 species known from Pakistan 6 species are considered vulnerable (VU) according to IUCN Red List whereas 4 species are data deficient (DD), 1 is not evaluated and 1 is least concerned (LC) indicating that almost all species are facing the vulnerable and may face extinction. This warrants that their export is controlled by placing them in CITES Appendix-II, as similar exploitation and vulnerability trend exists for all the species of wedgefishes and guitarfishes in their range of distribution.

Department of Fisheries of two maritime provinces i.e. Sindh and Balochistan, considering the vulnerability of the species of wedgefishes and guitarfishes has already included them in the species whose catching, landing and marketing is banned. It will, therefore, be justified that Pakistan may be a proponent for the draft CITES Appendix II listing proposals are being prepared for some members of these taxonomic groups and persuade range States for this listing proposals. The matter may be brought to the notice of the CITES Animals Committee and Standing Committee meetings to be held this year.