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Agenda Item 25.6.3

**REPORT OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE SINGLE SPECIES ACTION PLAN FOR THE ANGELSHARK IN THE
MEDITERRANEAN SEA (ANGELSHARK WG1)**

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

Summary:

This document contains the report of the first Meeting of the Working Group on the Implementation of the Single Species Action Plan for the Angelshark (*Squatina squatina*) in the Mediterranean Sea that took place online on 29-30 April 2025.

REPORT OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SINGLE SPECIES ACTION PLAN FOR THE ANGELSHARK IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Agenda item 1: Opening of the Meeting

1. Melanie Virtue, Head of the Aquatic Species Team of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), welcomed participants. She noted that the Working Group (WG), which is meeting for the first time, has yet to designate its Chair. She suggested, and the WG agreed, that Andrea Pauly, CMS Programme Manager for the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (Sharks MoU), would chair the meeting.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the Agenda

2. Andrea Pauly noted the agenda of the meeting was shortened to accommodate for the meeting's virtual setting.
3. The Working Group adopted the Agenda ([UNEP/CMS/Angelshark WG1/Doc.2.1/Rev.2](#)).

Agenda item 3: Reports

4. The Secretariat and James Ellis (Chair of the Sharks MoU Advisory Committee) informed WG members of the passing of Marino Vacchi, who co-authored the Single Species Action Plan (SSAP) for the Angelshark in the Mediterranean, emphasizing his dedication to shark conservation.
5. The Secretariat recalled the process that led to the adoption of the SSAP, highlighting among others:
 - the listing of the species on CMS Appendix I and II in 2018 and related agreement to develop a regional action plan;
 - the development of a conservation strategy and a Mediterranean action plan by the Angelshark Conservation Network (ASCN) in 2019;
 - Marino Vacchi's and James Ellis' drafting of the SSAP in 2021-2022;
 - consultations with Range States, their endorsement of the SSAP in 2022, and the Sharks MoU's endorsement of the Plan in 2023; and
 - the adoption of the SSAP at CMS COP14 in 2024.
6. The Secretariat further recalled the mandates provided in Resolution 14.12 and Decisions 14.101-14.105, including:
 - for Parties to implement SSAP activities, provide materials to update Annex III and develop an Annex IV to the SSAP, submit reports on SSAP implementation before COP15, and encourage Non-Party Range States to adopt the SSAP;
 - for Non-Party Range States to engage in SSAP activities;
 - for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and experts to provide technical support for SSAP implementation and the development of Annex IV; and
 - for the Secretariat to assist in the establishment of governance and monitoring systems, develop a reporting form, and convene meetings to stimulate coordination and implementation.
7. The Secretariat noted that the relevant Non-Party Range State for the SSAP is Türkiye.

8. The Secretariat further reported on progress achieved so far, highlighting:
- a number of actions implemented by Parties and partners ([UNEP/CMS/Angelshark WG1/Doc.4.1](#));
 - two projects implemented with funding from the Government of Germany and the Government of the Principality of Monaco on spatial management and the development of Annex IV;
 - the development of a draft governance structure for the SSAP;
 - the development of a draft programme of work;
 - the development of a reporting template;
 - the submission of reports on implementation progress;
 - the identification of potential further steps to be recommended; and
 - engagement of experts from Türkiye.
9. The Working Group took note of the report.

Agenda item 4: Monitoring

4.1 Summary of reports on implementation by Range States

10. The Secretariat recalled it had developed a [reporting template](#) that was shared on 28 February 2025. Up to WG1, reports were received from eight Range States (Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Syria, France, Albania, and Algeria), and four reports from partner organizations. Not all were received in time to be included in the Secretariat's summary report ([UNEP/CMS/AngelsharkWG1/Doc.4.1](#)), but the Secretariat said that these would be integrated in an updated summary report, including recommendations for future implementation of the SSAP, to be circulated and then published ahead of the 15th session of the CMS Conference of the Parties (COP15), also inviting further submissions to inform the update.
11. The Secretariat noted that 14 Range States have yet to submit reports. They further noted that, although Syria did submit a report, the country emphasized that it could not address the objectives of the SSAP due to the ongoing 14-year conflict in the country and lack of funding. Responding to Montenegro and the European Commission, the Secretariat invited a resubmission of any reports that may have been overlooked.
12. Providing a summary of reports received ([UNEP/CMS/AngelsharkWG1/Doc.4.1](#)), the Secretariat highlighted:
- on Action 1.1 (prohibition in fisheries regulations): Croatia, Cyprus, and Greece enforce EU regulations prohibiting the capture, retention, and sale of *Squatina* species; Croatia and Spain are implementing national measures; and legislative efforts are ongoing in Cyprus, Tunisia, and Türkiye;
 - on Action 1.2 (species protection): Croatia and Spain have national legislation; Greece lacks national legislation; and Cyprus and Türkiye are working on including Angelsharks in protected species lists;
 - on Action 1.3 (awareness programmes): various campaigns are underway across Range States, with Croatia and Spain working on data sharing and recovery plans;
 - on Action 1.4 (monitoring and enforcement): Croatia is aligning with EU regulation; Cyprus is using conventional and electronic monitoring; Greece is fully implementing measures; and Spain is reinforcing inspections and using citizen reporting tools;
 - on Action 2.1 (data collection): various surveys and studies are underway but Range States report challenges due to lack of structured monitoring, funding, and interinstitutional collaboration;

- on Action 2.2 (habitat modelling): Cyprus, Greece, and Spain are identifying critical areas for Angelsharks through ecosystem and habitat modelling; Croatia notes challenges related to insufficient data and funding;
- on Action 2.3 (environmental DNA sampling): Croatia and Spain report the technique's use, while Greece and Cyprus point to funding and capacity limitations;
- on Action 2.4 (non-destructive site sampling): Croatia and Spain are using non-invasive visual surveys to monitor Angelsharks;
- on Action 2.5 (current MPA network): Range States reported varying progress in integrating Angelsharks conservation in marine protected areas (MPAs), pointing to data limitations and funding shortages; with Greece noting that identified Critical Angelshark Areas (CASAs) do not fall within its national MPA network;
- on action 3.1 (scientific monitoring): Range States are monitoring elasmobranch bycatch through existing frameworks, with Spain implementing targeted efforts;
- on action 3.2 (commercial fishery data): Range States are monitoring and enforcing Angelshark catch data, but face challenges due to limited data, lack of standardized protocols, and resistance from commercial fleets;
- on action 3.3 (recreational fishery): Range States are engaging recreational fishers in Angelshark conservation, including in data collection, but face challenges in terms of policy inclusion;
- on action 3.4 (citizen science): Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, and Spain are engaging recreational fishers and divers in Angelshark conservation but face challenges in expanding awareness programmes due to limited staff, funding, and coordination;
- on action 3.5 (fisher-independent survey): Greece and Spain are conducting surveys in pilot monitoring programs, while Croatia and Cyprus highlight challenges related to limited staff, funding, and data integration;
- on action 3.6 (discarded Angelshark survival): Spain has initiated trials on Angelshark release protocols;
- on Action 3.7 (tagging): Greece and Spain are advancing tagging efforts for Angelsharks;
- on Action 3.8 (population structure and connectivity): Greece and Spain are collecting tissue samples for genetic analysis;
- on Action 3.9 (life-history studies): Spain is conducting biological sampling for morphometry and growth studies and Türkiye has biological data to share;
- on Action 3.10 (population dynamics): Spain has been collecting sightings data since 2014, contributing to the development of Angelshark Conservation Relevant Areas (ARCAs) in the Canary Islands, while Croatia, Cyprus, and Greece face challenges in conducting long-term population dynamics studies due to limited data, funding, and capacity;
- on action 4.1 (resources): Cyprus and Spain are securing resources for long-term Angelshark conservation, with Cyprus evaluating EU funding options;
- on Action 4.2 (international working group): Cyprus, Greece, and Spain are contributing to establish an international working group; and
- on Action 4.3 (appraising protected areas): Greece and Spain are working to integrate CASAs into MPAs, while Cyprus is still identifying CASAs and discussing MPA expansion.

13. In the ensuing discussion, participants highlighted, among others:

- Türkiye has issued legislation on Angelshark protection in 2018;
- the need to conduct trainings on species identification; and

- the need to clarify the concepts of “Angelshark Conservation Relevant Areas” and “Critical Angelshark Areas” and how they relate to the “Important Shark and Ray Areas”-approach of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
14. The Secretariat invited feedback on the inclusion, in the summary report, of information provided by partner organizations alongside information provided by Range States. Emphasizing the country has submitted a national report, Cyprus noted they do not wish to see another report concerning the country reflected in the summary, underscoring that any additional information by partner organizations should be discussed with the relevant country. The Secretariat indicated it will prepare separate documents to summarize information provided by governments and partner organizations, respectively.
 15. The Secretariat was requested to reach out to Range States that have yet to submit reports and updated summary reports will be shared with WG members for review in time for publication in August 2025.

4.2 Options for data sharing

16. The Angelshark Conservation Network (ASCN) recalled that the SSAP calls for the collation of data from both historic and contemporary sources regarding Angelsharks (*Squatina Squatina*) and sister taxa to improve knowledge of the species. They noted the value of national reports in providing data, emphasizing the value of data on, among others: life history, presence, abundance, distribution, population structure and connectivity, suitable habitat, and interaction with fisheries.
17. As tools that could be used for data sharing, the ASCN pointed to:
 - the [Angel Shark Sightings Map](#), which is now covering a growing number of species, serves as a repository of presence data, and is offered in several languages; and
 - the [T-Shark Platform](#), funded by the German Federal Environment Ministry and hosted by the University of Padova (Italy), which provides an interactive map of sharks being tagged in the Mediterranean in the context of research projects, noting that data owners decide how much information is made available to public users.
18. The ASCN offered to serve as a data manager to the WG, in order to compile, manage, and analyse data as needed.
19. Participants highlighted, among others:
 - the work General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean on developing a platform for sharing best practices and research on vulnerable species;
 - confidentiality issues, notably with regard to sharing GPS data, and ways to address these constraints, such as through specific data protocols or the signing confidentiality agreements; and
 - filters that give different types of users varying levels of access to data.
20. The Working Group supported developing a draft COP Decision to instruct the Secretariat to develop a data sharing protocol in collaboration with the ASCN during the next triennium.

Agenda item 5: Spatial Management

21. The Angel Shark Project recalled that objective 2 of the SSAP calls for the identification of sites and habitats of Angelshark in the Mediterranean Sea with a view to identify former, current, and potential Critical Angel Shark Areas (CASAs) and ascertain the status of Angelsharks in these areas.

22. They presented an overview of current area-based management approaches for Angelsharks in the Mediterranean Sea ([UNEP/CMS/AngelsharkWG1/Doc.5.1.Rev.1](#)), noting the assessment is intended to be periodically updated and aims to guide the implementation of SSAP activities. The focus of the report is on the Angelshark (*Squatina Squatina*), but it also provides information on the Smoothback Angelshark and the Sawback Angelshark to account for overlaps in distribution and identification challenges. The report builds on: sightings data for the last 20 years; habitat suitability models; the IUCN's Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs), ISRA candidate sites, and areas of interest; and information on existing nationally-designated MPAs, Natura 2000 sites, fisheries-restricted areas, and Ramsar sites.
23. The report found, among others, that:
 - only 2% of ISRAs are covered by MPAs with fully/partially implemented management plans, noting it is unclear whether the management plans include measures that specifically benefit Angelsharks;
 - only 5% of the suitable habitat for Angelsharks is located within MPAs with fully/partially implemented management plans; and
 - 42% of Angelshark sightings were within such MPAs.
24. The report identified priorities in terms of countries, areas, actions, and research. Recommendations relate to, among others, the identification of sites and habitats for species-level protection.
25. The Angel Shark Project emphasized the recommendation to set a target of having at least 10% of ISRAs covered by MPAs with a fully implemented management plan, possibly within a specific timeframe.
26. Participants reflected on:
 - the influence of climate change on suitable habitats;
 - overlaps with areas of importance for other CMS listed species, noting ISRAs are not specific-specific;
 - whether to focus only on ISRAs or also candidate ISRAs and areas of interest;
 - the rationale for setting a target of specifically 10% of ISRAs covered by MPAs, with the Angel Shark Project noting it is a scientifically valid recommendation and that it aligns with other processes, such as the EU's target of 10% full protection;
 - the fact that the ISRA-process does not rely on modelling, such as on habitat suitability, but builds only on actual sightings data and other evidence-based data;
 - examining what could explain lack of Angelshark sightings in habitat that is in principle found to be suitable for the species, such as specific threats in the area; and
 - the need to take into account fisheries management measures applicable around ISRAs.
27. The Secretariat noted its intention to prepare a document for COP15 on area-based management that would include information on ISRAs, Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), and other initiatives, such as for marine turtles. It further recalled that [Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework](#) calls for ensuring that at least 30% of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed. The Secretariat suggested that parties could, in fulfilling GBF Target 3, prioritize areas of importance for Angelsharks and other CMS-listed species.
28. The Working Group decided to reflect on the recommendations to forward to COP15 on this matter through a written procedure. The Secretariat was tasked to circulate the document for comments.

Agenda item 6: Review of the Single Species Action Plan for the Angelshark in the Mediterranean Sea

6.1 Review of Annex III of the SSAP

29. The Secretariat recalled that the SSAP is a static document that can only be amended by the COP upon suggestion by the Working Group, whereas the Annexes to the Plan are living documents subject to regular updates. Decision 14.101 (b) requests Party Range States to provide relevant information to update Annex III, which provides an overview of legislation relevant to the conservation of Angelsharks.
30. In terms of the process for updating Annex III, the Secretariat noted it will: incorporate information provided in Range States' national reports; follow up with those who have not submitted a report to get information on their national legislation; and prepare an update of Annex III for consideration by COP15. The update will be circulated to Working Group members for comments before publication in August 2025.

6.2 Review of Annex IV “Tools and Guidelines to Support Implementation of the SSAP”

31. The Secretariat recalled that Decision 14.104 mandates the development of an overview of tools and guidelines to support the implementation of the SSAP, which will become Annex IV to the SSAP. With funding from the German Federal Ministry of the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and the Principality of Monaco, the Shark Trust was commissioned to develop a first draft.
32. The Shark Trust presented the draft Annex ([UNEP/CMS/Angelshark WG1/Doc.6.2](#)), which addresses, among others: identification, management, safe release, codes of conduct, and sightings reporting. Noting that several resources are already available in various languages, they invited Range States to identify additional needs or areas for further refinement of the tools and guidelines.
33. The Angelshark Conservation Network offered to publish the document on its website, which the Shark Trust and Working Group welcomed.
34. The Working Group welcomed the draft and agreed to invite the submission of further resources for inclusion in an update before publication in August 2025 for consideration by COP15.

Agenda item 7: Programme of Work

35. The Secretariat presented a draft Programme of Work (POW) for the remaining period of the triennium, that is 2025–2026 ([UNEP/CMS/AngelsharkWG1/Doc.7.1](#)). The first part outlines core activities for coordination and governance, which would be absolute minimum activities, whereas the second part presents suggested implementation activities addressing key objectives and conservation priorities of the SSAP. The second part was populated on the basis of suggestions by implementing partners who prepared concept notes, including estimated budgetary needs, for potential projects.
36. Among others, the draft POW points to:
 - the recruitment of a part-time consultant to facilitate communication, coordination, fundraising, and prepare documentation, including on implementation progress;
 - meeting and travel related budgetary needs;

- in-kind Secretariat services; and
 - suggested projects by the ASCN and the Angelshark Project, including on data management, outreach campaigns, population connectivity, fisher training, and the development of further CMS and CITES listing proposals.
37. The Secretariat recalled that the POW is internal to the WG and is not subject to adoption by the COP. In terms of funding setup, they noted: a fund for voluntary contributions can be created to fund SSAP-related activities; or the Secretariat could administer a list of relevant projects that donors may want to fund.
38. The Working Group reflected on the need for resources to ensure the implementation of the SSAP. It underscored the value of defining a set of priority actions, including to guide fundraising efforts and help track implementation progress, noting the PoW could be revised at a future WG meeting.
39. The Secretariat was tasked to gather written comments on the draft POW.

Agenda item 8: Institutional Matters

40. The Secretariat recalled that Decision 14.101 (c) directs Range States to establish a governance structure to support and monitor the implementation of the SSAP and Decision 14.105 (b) requests the Secretariat to support these efforts.
41. The Secretariat introduced a draft governance structure for the SSAP ([UNEP/CMS/AngelsharkWG1/Doc.8.1](#)), based on discussions held in the context of the development of the SSAP. It addresses, among others:
- the composition of the Working Group, with:
 - one focal point and one national expert per Range State, experts from the ASCN, and potentially other stakeholders either as full members or observers;
 - a Chair and a Co-Chair elected for one COP triennium, with a possible follow-up term; and
 - a coordinator for day-to-day management;
 - the endorsement of a PoW covering one triennium;
 - an annual meeting rhythm to assess SSAP implementation progress and dedicated meetings before COP sessions;
 - funding, including the potential establishment of a fund to support activities in developing countries and by NGOs; and
 - monitoring, with annual reports by Range States building on a standardized template, and a triennial progress analysis, which serves to develop recommendations to be submitted to the COP.
42. The document also includes a draft budget, including a core budget (EUR 38,420) and an implementation budget for potential projects suggested by implementing partners (EUR 192,740). This budget will not be subject to the COP's approval and all contributions are voluntary.
43. The Secretariat encouraged Parties to support implementing partners financially and invited pledges to support the core budget and potential projects. It emphasized the need to fund the work of the Coordinator (EUR 24,000).
44. The Working Group agreed to the Governance Structure and nominated Ms. Eva Meyer (Angelshark Project) as Coordinator.

45. The Secretariat was tasked to circulate a call for nominations to Range States for the roles as Chair and Vice-Chair of the WG and to invite comments on, and approval of, the budget.

Agenda item 9: Next Steps

46. The Secretariat was tasked to follow up with WG members on various issues (including membership, POW, and the update of Annex III) and prepare and update documents for the Eighth Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council (ScC-SC8) and/or COP15, including SSAP Annexes III and IV, the guidance on spatial management, and the WG's agreed governance structure and implementation progress.

Agenda item 10: Closure of the Meeting

47. The Secretariat closed the meeting, encouraging Range States and implementing partners to continue to collaborate, engage and step up implementation efforts for the conservation of the Angelshark in the Mediterranean.

ANNEX

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Party Range States

Country	Name	Title	E-Mail
Albania	Edit Vardhami	Biodiversity Expert, Ministry of Tourism and Environment	edit.vardhami@turizmi.gov.al
Algeria	Samir ROUIDI	Researcher, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries	rouidi.samir@gmail.com
	Tahar FILALI	Researcher, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries	filalitahar@gmail.com
Croatia	Jelena Uros	Senior Advisor, Nature Protection Directorate	jelena.uros@mzozt.hr
Cyprus	Charis Charilaou	Fisheries and Marine Research Officer, Department of Fisheries and Marine Research	ccharilaou@dfmr.moa.gov.cy
Egypt	Moustafa Fouda	Minister Advisor of Biodiversity Matters, Ministry of Environment	drfoudamos@gmail.com
EU	Bianca Wiles	Policy Assistant, European Commission DG MARE	bianca.wiles@ec.europa.eu
France	Anthony Acou	Scientific Project Manager, Office Français de la Biodiversité / UAR PatriNat	anthony.acou@mnhn.fr
	Caroline Bousquet	Scientific Assistant, The Office of the Environment of Corsica	carolinem.bousquet@gmail.com
Greece	Ioannis Giovos	Conservation Officer, iSea	ioannis.giovos@isea.com.gr
Libya	Sara Almabruk	Technical Focal Point, Angel Shark Project Libya	info@mb.org.ly

Country	Name	Title	E-Mail
Malta	Mauro Spatafora	Environment Protection Officer Assistant, Biodiversity and Water Unit	mauro.spatafora96@gmail.com
Montenegro	Ilija Cetkovic	Research Assistant, Institute of Marine Biology - University of Montenegro	ilija.c@ucg.ac.me
Morocco	Mohamed Keznine	Researcher, Biology	mohamedkeznine2015@gmail.com
Spain	Sandra Barrios de Pedro	Head of Technical Section, Sub direction of Terrestrial and Marine Biodiversity	sbarrios@miteco.es

Sharks MOU Advisory Committee Members

Country	Name	Title	E-Mail
Jim Ellis		Fisheries Ecologist, CEFAS	jim.ellis@cefas.gov.uk
Rima Jabado		Chair, IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group	rimajabado@hotmail.com

Non-governmental Organizations

Organization	Name	Title	E-Mail
Angel Shark Project - Leibniz Institute for the Analysis of Biodiversity Change	Eva Meyers	Co-Lead and Programme Manager	angelshark2014@gmail.com
Mersea Consulting	Aylin Ulman	Director	merseamed@gmail.com
Manara University, Syrian Arab Republic	Adib Saad	Head, Biology	adibsaad52@gmail.com
Marine Biodiversity Laboratory, Tunisia	Samira Enajjar	Researcher	enajjarsamira@yahoo.fr
Mediterranean Programme	Alexandre Bartolí	Marine Biologist - Consultant	alexbartoli.sa@gmail.com
The Shark Trust	Ali Hood	Director of Conservation	ali@sharktrust.org
The Shark Trust	Cat Gordon	Senior Conservation Officer	cat@sharktrust.org
The Shark Trust	Hettie Brown	Conservation Officer	hettie@sharktrust.org

Mediterranean Marine Initiative	Simone Niedermueller	Regional Manager	simone.niedermueller@w wf.at
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Secretariat

Name	Title	E-Mail
Melanie Virtue	Head of Aquatic Species Team	melanie.virtue@un.org
Andrea Pauly	Programme Officer/Sharks MOU Coordinator, CMS	andrea.pauly@un.org
Nora Klasen	Programme Support Intern	nora.klasen@un.org
