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**Interviews:** Available with Alex Bartolí (Submon) and David Jiménez Alvarado (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) on request

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## FULL PROTECTION FOR ANGEL SHARKS IN THE CANARY ISLANDS

**The Spanish Ministry of Ecological Transition has announced today that angel shark populations are fully protected in the Canary Islands, through inclusion on the Spanish Endangered Species List**

The Angelshark (*Squatina squatina*), was formerly common across the Atlantic coasts of Europe and Africa, including the Mediterranean and the Black Seas. Over the last 100 years, they have undergone dramatic declines, but the Canary Islands remains a unique stronghold for this species, where Angelsharks are still regularly sighted in large numbers. Protection of Angelsharks in the Canary Island archipelago is of vital importance to ensure the survival of this species. The Angelshark is classified as Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species. Two other Critically Endangered species are present in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea but have not yet been documented in the Canary Islands.

After several months of work preparing technical reports in collaboration with the Spanish Ministry of Ecological Transition, three species of angel shark (*Squatina squatina*, as well as *S. aculeata* and *S.*



*oculata*) have been included in the Spanish Endangered Species List for Canary Island waters, under the category of “in danger of extinction” (the highest category within this legislation).

This protection is in addition to an existing European Union (EU) fisheries regulation which prohibits targetting, retention, trans-shipping or landing of Angelshark (*S. squatina*) for all EU and third country vessels fishing in EU waters (Council Regulation (EU) No 2019/124). Any species included in the Spanish Endangered Species List will have full protection; any action performed with the purpose of killing, capturing, or disturbing Angelsharks; as well as destruction or deterioration of Angelshark habitat and breeding areas; or processing, selling, transporting, trading or exchanging live or dead Angelsharks is prohibited.

*"On behalf of the Angel Shark Conservation Network (ASCN), we are delighted with this important announcement, after working with government officials for a number of years. We hope that in due course the protection will be extended to encompass all angel shark populations found in Spanish waters, not just those in the Canary Islands, as reflected in our original proposal"* comments Àlex Bartolí, from Submon.

*"This is the best news for this species and for all the people who dedicate their efforts to better conserve angel sharks. This new level of protection will enable us to continue our research to better understand the ecology and biology of this species in its unique stronghold of the Canary Islands. All the information for the proposal was developed in collaboration with a number of key stakeholders (divers, recreational fishermen and researchers) who we would like to thank for their important efforts to make this a reality,"* adds Dr. David Jiménez Alvarado, Co-Leader of Angel Shark Project: Canary Islands



## Editors notes

### Background

In June 2016 we conducted a workshop in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria to bring together key stakeholders (scientists, divers, fishers, NGO's and government officials) to develop the 'Angelshark Action Plan for the Canary Islands'. Following its launch in 2016, the founding members of the Angel Shark Conservation Network (Angel Shark Project, IUCN Shark Specialist Group, Shark Trust and Submon) started to deliver priority actions outlined in this document. Including the Angelshark in the Spanish Endangered Species List was identified as the key priority for legislative change.

### Angelshark

The Angelshark (*Squatina squatina*) is a flattened shark, normally found on seabed to at least a 150m depth. This species uses its broad fins to bury itself in the sand and ambush prey that swim within reach. It can reach up to 2.4m in length and opportunistically feeds on a range of fish, crustaceans and molluscs. **Angelshark** refers to the common name of the species *Squatina squatina*, whilst **angel shark** refers to the angel shark family Squatinidae (ie. more than one species).

### Funders:



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### Angel Shark Conservation Network

The Angel Shark Conservation Network (ASCN) is a multidisciplinary group of organisations and individuals working together to deliver the Angelshark Action Plan for the Canary Islands and East Atlantic and Mediterranean Angel Shark Conservation Strategy. The main objectives of the ASCN are:

- Facilitate dialogue and information sharing on all matters concerning angel shark conservation, including collaborative projects and joint funding opportunities.
- Host an email-group to send updates, providing information on activities in progress or completed as part of the Action Plan or Strategy.
- Ensure that consistent and clear messages regarding angel shark conservation is delivered to the wider community.
- Encourage a core group of individuals/organisations to attend a follow-on Angel Shark Conservation Workshop in 2020.

[www.angelsharknetwork.com](http://www.angelsharknetwork.com)

### Angel Shark Project

The Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC), Zoological Research Museum Alexander Koenig - Leibniz Institute for Animal Biodiversity (ZFMK) and Zoological Society of London (ZSL), set



up the Angel Shark Project in 2014 with the overall goal to safeguard the future of Critically Endangered angel sharks throughout their natural range. The Angel Shark Project is an interdisciplinary programme that collects ecological and population data whilst engaging with local communities, researchers and government to raise awareness and deliver conservation action. [www.angelsharkproject.com](http://www.angelsharkproject.com)

### **IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group**

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group (SSG) is a global network of experts in the biology, taxonomy, use, and conservation of sharks, rays, and chimaeras (cartilaginous fishes, Class Chondrichthyes). The SSG currently has more than 170 members from 55 countries collaborating to assess threat level, collate knowledge, highlight species at risk, and advise decision makers on effective, science-based policies for sustainable use, and long-term conservation. [www.iucnssg.org](http://www.iucnssg.org)

### **The Shark Trust**

The Shark Trust was established in 1997 to provide a voice for sharks in the UK. Today, as a well-respected global advocate for shark management and protection, the Trust works to safeguard shark and ray populations by advocating for science-based conservation and sustainably managed fisheries. For more information visit: [www.sharktrust.org](http://www.sharktrust.org).

### **SUBMON**

SUBMON is a non for profit organization that, since 2003, has developed projects focused in the different aspects of research, awareness and conservation of the marine environment. SUBMON's working team consists of biologists, veterinarians, engineers, naturalists and education professionals, who apply their technical knowledge in the fields of conservation biology and medicine, and to establish sound environmental education and awareness strategies, always related to the marine environment. [www.submon.org](http://www.submon.org)

### **Zoological Research Museum Alexander Koenig - Leibniz Institute for Animal Biodiversity (ZFMK)**

Zoological Research Museum Alexander Koenig - Leibniz Institute for Animal Biodiversity, Foundation under public law, (ZFMK) is one of the largest natural history research museums in Germany. The museum has earned its reputation as a leader in the documentation, research, and interpretation of biodiversity. [www.zfmk.de](http://www.zfmk.de)

### **Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC)**

The Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC) is one of the leading Spanish universities and is a leader in the use of new technologies and research related to marine and maritime areas. It is comprised of 153 research groups covering all fields of knowledge. [www.ulpgc.es](http://www.ulpgc.es)

### **ZSL**



ZSL (Zoological Society of London) is an international conservation charity working to create a world where wildlife thrives. From investigating the health threats facing animals to helping people and wildlife live alongside each other, ZSL is committed to bringing wildlife back from the brink of extinction. Our work is realised through our ground-breaking science, our field conservation around the world and engaging millions of people through our two zoos, ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo. For more information, visit [www.zsl.org](http://www.zsl.org)