

SPECIES INFORMATION SHEET

Cetorhinus maximus

English name: Basking shark	Scientific name: <i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>	
Taxonomical group: Class: Elasmobranchii Order: Lamniformes Family: Cetorhinidae	Species authority: Gunnerus, 1765	
Subspecies, Variations, Synonyms: –	Generation length: Not known	
Past and current threats (Habitats Directive article 17 codes): Fishery (F02)	Future threats (Habitats Directive article 17 codes): Bycatch (F02)	
IUCN Criteria: –	HELCOM Red List Category:	NA Not Applicable
Global / European IUCN Red List Category: VU (EN in North East Atlantic)/NE (in European assessment)	Habitats Directive: –	
Previous HELCOM Red List Category (2007): EN		
Protection and Red List status in HELCOM countries: Denmark <i>illegal to catch since 2006. (EF) 51/2006</i> /–, Estonia –/–, Finland –/–, Germany –/–, Latvia –/–, Lithuania –/–, Poland –/–, Russia –/–, Sweden <i>prohibited to fish for and land this species all year round</i> / CR		

Distribution and status in the Baltic Sea region

The basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*) is the second largest fish species in the world. It is migratory and widely distributed in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, but only regularly seen in a few favoured coastal locations and probably never abundant. In the HELCOM area it is only a very rare visitor from the North Sea. The basking shark has been exploited for several centuries to supply liver oil for lighting and industrial use, skin for leather and flesh for food or fishmeal. It has been declining worldwide and is assessed as Endangered in the North east Atlantic. Basking shark is on the CITES list annex 2 meaning that trade is strictly regulated to protect the species.

Habitat and ecology

The basking shark is a very large, filter-feeding cold-water pelagic species that is often associated with surface aggregations of zooplankton where they feed on small fish, fish eggs and zooplankton by swimming open-mouthed with gill rakers erect and extended across the gaps between the gill arches to form a sieve. Ovoviviparous species. Males become sexually mature at a length of 5–7 m, age unknown, but possibly 12–16 years. Females are mature at 8.1–9.8 m and perhaps 16–20 years. Maximum lifespan of 50 years has been reported.

Description of major threats

The basking shark has been exploited for several centuries and although targeted fishing is limited today bycatch is still a threat to the species.

Assessment justification

There has never been a regular occurrence of mature individuals in the HELCOM area, and hence the species is considered Not Applicable (NA) for the assessment.

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Recommendations for actions to conserve the species

This species is a rare visitor to the HELCOM area but since it is threatened in adjacent areas fishing for this species should be prohibited.

Common names

D -Riesenhai; ES -; GB - Basking shark; DK -Brugde; FIN - Jättiläishai; LV - Milzu haizivs; LT -Milžinryklis; PL -Długoszar; RU -Gigantskaja akula; S - Brugd

References

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- Curry-Lindahl, K. (1985). Våra fiskar. Havs- och sötvattensfiskar i Norden och övriga Europa. P. A. Norstedt & Söners Förlag, Stockholm. 528 pp.
- Fowler, S.L. (2005). *Cetorhinus maximus*. In: IUCN 2012. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Available at: www.iucnredlist.org (viewed 26 January 2013)
- HELCOM (2007). HELCOM Red list of threatened and declining species of lampreys and fish of the Baltic Sea. Baltic Sea Environmental Proceedings No. 109. Helsinki Commission, Helsinki. 40 pp.
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