



COSEWIC Assessment Summary

Assessment Summary – April 2007

Common name

Basking shark - Pacific population

Scientific name

Cetorhinus maximus

Status

Endangered

Reason for designation

This shark species is the only extant species in the family Cetorhinidae. It occurs circumglobally in temperate coastal shelf waters, and exists in Canada as two geographically isolated designatable units – Atlantic and Pacific. The species is vulnerable to incidental fishing mortality because of its low intrinsic productivity. Females do not mature until 16 to 20 years old, gestate between 2.6 and 3.5 years (the longest known gestation period for any vertebrate), and produce litters of only about 6 “pups”. These sharks are especially susceptible to entanglement in fishing gear and collision with boats because of their large size, surface behaviour and fearlessness around boats, and because their coastal distribution overlaps fishing and boating areas. Prior to 1970, large aggregations of these sharks were seasonally common in Pacific Canada, but only 6 sightings have been confirmed since 1996. This dramatic reduction in abundance is attributed to directed fisheries for liver oil (1941-1947) and an eradication program (until 1970) that killed hundreds, perhaps thousands of individuals between 1945 and 1970. The minimum historical population reconstructed from documented kills was at least 750 individuals, whereas the current population is virtually nil, implying a rate of decline exceeding 90% within < 2 generations. The species is believed to migrate seasonally between Canada and California, where regional aggregations were also severely depleted by historic fisheries. Rescue from outside Canada is unlikely.

Occurrence

Pacific Ocean

Status history

Designated Endangered in April 2007. Assessment based on a new status report.