

# Artisanal fishing survey reveals a kaleidoscope of marine species caught in Eastern Africa: almost 10% were threatened or prohibited species

Tuesday 19 September, 2023

Following a seven-month photographic survey, TRAFFIC's report [Assessment of Marine Species Traded at East African Artisanal Fish Landing Sites](#), released today, observed around 70000 individual marine creatures openly landed and traded at sites across Kenya, Tanzania, and the island of Zanzibar. Worryingly, 37 of 489 identified species were Threatened\*, Near Threatened\*, and CITES<sup>1</sup>-listed species.

Bordered by tropical white sands or majestic cliffs, the shores and reefs of Eastern Africa are home to a diverse array of marine species that provide food security and income for many coastal communities. However, the irreplaceable ecological and economic value of these fisheries could be wiped out if current unsustainable harvesting methods and lack of enforcement continue.

## Cause for Concern

During surveys, TRAFFIC experts witnessed hauls from artisanal fisheries containing the IUCN Red List\* and CITES<sup>1</sup>-listed species. These include giants of the reef, like the Endangered\* Humphead Wrasse *Cheilinus undulatus*, which can grow up to almost two metres long, alongside comparatively tiny reef species like the Vulnerable\* Spotted Seahorse *Hippocampus kuda* at just 17 CM long.

Concerningly, 63% of species landed were less than 30 CM. "The wide variety of species and the high proportion of smaller-sized fish raise concerns, suggesting the use of indiscriminate harvesting gear to maximise catch, which places reef ecosystems and threatened species at risk," says Oliver Wright, Project Support Officer and lead author of the report. "This could pose long-term adverse economic consequences for local communities and ecological risks as it reduces the fish available for reproduction and, in turn, fish populations for future generations."

On top of this, surveys found CITES-listed species, such as Bottlenose Wedgefish *Rhynchobatus australiae* and Bowmouth Guitarfish *Rhina ancylostoma*, that are Critically Endangered\*, locally protected and at high risk of extinction due to their slow reproduction and unsustainable exploitation of their highly sought-after fins and meat. The demand for their "white" fins and products of other ray and shark species once again reveals the threats faced by sharks and rays, whose global abundance has declined by 71% since 1970.

## Calls for Action

The report calls for governments to address differences in fishing laws between neighbouring countries that may lead to illegal transboundary fishing, loopholes and a lack of consistent enforcement. It is vital that there are clear and consistent transboundary rules on extremely destructive or indiscriminate fishing gear and methods, from the net mesh sizes and types of traps to the prohibition of explosives and electrocution. It also recommends capacity building, cross-country communications, and local fisheries law enforcement training on catch regulation and marine species identification.

Additionally, awareness-raising initiatives for artisanal fishing communities will help them understand the importance of sustainable practices and fisheries management and marine species identification and reinforce local restrictions on catch and trade.

"By implementing the recommendations in this report, governments can better protect the keystone marine species that are important to the region's ecosystems and communities while also ensuring long-term economic and environmental sustainability," says Camilla Floros, ReTTA Project Leader and report co-author.

## TRAFFIC Gearing Up For Action

Action begins today as TRAFFIC's Reducing Trade Threats to Africa's wild species and ecosystems (ReTTA) project delivers a workshop with key stakeholders in the artisanal fisheries of Zanzibar. Its aim is to better understand the challenges in this critically important sector and discuss solutions to ensure

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continued socio-economic benefits to local communities while conserving the marine ecosystems that provide these valuable resources.

Last year, the same project, funded by Arcadia, [installed information boards](#) at key landing sites in Kenya and Tanzania ports to raise awareness of prohibited threatened marine species and fishing regulations. These boards were well received by local fishers and authorities.

## ENDS

## Notes

\* IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

<sup>1</sup> the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

(All the species and quantities observed are on the survey results in Annex I, page 26.)

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