

Leopard Whipray, *Himantura leoparda*

Report Card assessment	Sustainable		
IUCN Red List Australian Assessment	Least Concern	IUCN Red List Global Assessment	Vulnerable
Global Assessors	Rigby, C., Moore, A. & Rowat, D.		
Australian Assessors	Kyne, P.M., Heupel, M.R., White, W.T., Simpfendorfer, C.A. (Shark Action Plan) & Rigby, C.L.		
Report Card Remarks	Australian incidental catches low, BRDs significantly reducing catch, marine parks provide refuge.		

Summary

The Leopard Whipray is a medium-sized continental shelf ray distributed across tropical waters of northern Australia and across the Indo-Pacific. It is caught incidentally and retained for its meat in at least Southeast Asia where significant population declines have occurred due to mostly unregulated fishing pressure and habitat loss. In Australia, it is caught incidentally in trawl and gillnet fisheries and likely released as most of these prohibit elasmobranch retention, although post-release mortality is unknown. Additionally, many of the trawl fisheries mandate the use of bycatch Reduction Devices (BRDs) which have been shown to reduce the catch of whiprays by >95%. Many parts of the species' range across northern Australia have low fishing effort that is managed and it receives significant refuge in the extensive network of marine parks. The Leopard Whipray is assessed as globally Vulnerable (IUCN) and in Australia, as Least Concern (IUCN) (Kyne et al. 2021) and Sustainable (SAFS).



Distribution

The Leopard Whipray occurs in tropical waters of northern Australia and across the Indo-Pacific from Papua New Guinea to South Africa (Last et al. 2016). In Australia, it ranges from Torres Strait (Queensland) to Coral Bay (Western Australia) (Manjaji-Matsumoto and Last 2008).

Stock structure and status

The population is inferred to have declined significantly across Southeast Asia due to high levels of mostly unregulated exploitation and inshore habitat loss, whereas in Australia, fishing pressure is limited and managed, and the population is suspected to be stable (Rigby et al. 2016, Kyne et al. 2021).

Fisheries

The Leopard Whipray is taken incidentally across the Indo-Pacific in a wide variety of fishing gears (except in Australia) and is retained for its meat and highly-valued skin (Rigby et al. 2016). In Australia, it is caught in the Commonwealth Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF) and in the Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) Developmental Fishery and Inshore Fishery (Jacobsen et al. 2019a, b). It is also possibly caught in the Northern Territory Demersal Fishery (DF) and Western Australian prawn fisheries and Pilbara Fish Trawl Fishery. Bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) have been mandated in most of these fisheries since the early-mid 2000s and reduce the catch of the whiprays by >95%, though they may not be as effective at excluding juveniles (Griffiths et al. 2006, Gaughan and Santoro 2021). If it is caught, it would be released as elasmobranch retention is now prohibited, except in the Queensland GoC Inshore Fishery, although post-release mortality is unknown. The Leopard Whipray was considered at low risk of overfishing in the NPF due to estimated fishing mortality being below levels leading to population reduction (Zhou and Griffiths 2008, Zhou et al. 2015). Catches in Western Australia prawn fisheries are likely minimal as effort is limited and negligible bycatch has been reported in recent years (Gaughan and Santoro 2021). Across northern Australia, many parts of the species' range have low fishing effort and the species would receive refuge in the extensive network of marine parks (Parks Australia 2023). Outside of Australia, the species is subject to intense and unregulated fishing pressure across its range (Rigby et al. 2016).

Habitat and biology

The Leopard Whipray is demersal on soft substrates of the continental and insular shelf at depths of 0–70 m (Manjaji-Matsumoto and Last 2008, Last et al. 2016). Maximum size is at least 140 cm disc width (DW) with males mature at 70–80 cm DW (Last et al. 2016). Little else is known of its biology.

Longevity and maximum size	Longevity: unknown Max size: at least 140 cm DW
Age and/or size at maturity (50%)	Males: 70–80 cm DW Females: unknown

CAAB Code: 37 035026

Link to IUCN Page: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/195456/68628645>

Link to page at Shark References: <https://shark-references.com/species/view/Himantura-leoparda>

References

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