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Securing the future for Australia's sharks

Researchers from James Cook University are leading a new project designed to ensure sustainable use and conservation of Australia's sharks and rays.

Funded by the Australian Government's Fisheries Research and Development Corporation the project will provide a report card on the status of all of Australia's sharks and rays, and build a database of science outputs that can be used by fisheries and environmental managers.

Professor Colin Simpfendorfer, who is Director of JCU's Centre for Sustainable Tropical Fisheries and Aquaculture (CSTFA), is leading the project.

"Globally many species of sharks and rays are under a lot of pressure, especially from overfishing," he said.

"However, Australia is a leader in both research and the science-based management of sharks and rays, so an important part of this project is to make sure we understand how Australia's sharks and rays are faring in light of these global concerns."

There are about 350 species of sharks and rays that live in Australian waters, and the project will compile information on all of them to ensure that environmental and fisheries managers have the most credible and up to date information when making decisions.

"To date, Australia's research and management for sharks and rays has focused on a few species that are caught in targeted fisheries or are the subjects of ecotourism," Andrew Chin, the researcher managing the project at the CSTFA, said.

"We want to make sure that we are not forgetting about some of the less common or less commonly studied species", he said.

The report card will provide fisheries and environmental managers with the ability to identify the species that need attention to ensure they are properly managed and conserved. It will also identify species for which research is required to understand their status and improve management.

The project will run until mid 2015 and involve working closely with shark and ray researchers around the country to collate information and assess the status of species.

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