

# *Cuba Launches Shark Protection Plan*

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Havana, October 22 (RHC-BBC) -- The Cuban government has launched a long-term plan to protect shark populations around its shores. The plan, devised together with a U.S. environmental group, will oblige fishermen to record and limit shark catches as well as create new protected fishing areas.

It's believed that nearly 20% of the world's 500 shark species swim in Cuban waters. Shark populations have been in rapid decline due to overfishing, demand for shark fins and accidental catches.

Cuba already bans harvesting sharks just for their fins. Cuba's plan was announced after two years of work with the U.S.-based Environmental Defense Fund (EDF). Its Cuba program director, Daniel Whittle, said shark populations in Cuba were sustained by relatively healthy coral reefs.

"Cuba is considered the crown jewel of the Caribbean, principally because of its incredible coral reef ecosystems, its mangroves, its sea-grasses," he said. The EDF says protecting shark populations can also be good business, as ecotourism is growing and a country's marine resources are an important asset.

Cuba is now planning a regional plan for shark conservation.



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