

# Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

## Whale Shark

### *Rhincodon typus*

#### Conservation status

##### Australia: Vulnerable

*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

##### Northern Territory: Data Deficient

*Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976*



#### Description

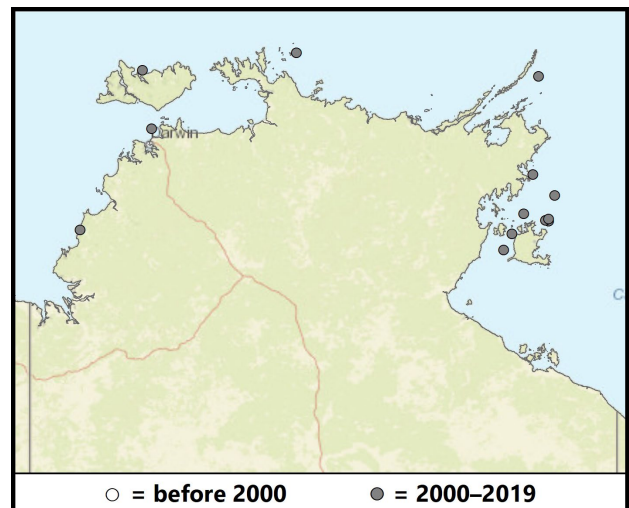
The Whale Shark is the world's largest fish, reaching a total length of 20 metres. It is easily recognised by its large size, broad flattened head, large mouth and pattern of light spots and stripes on a dark background. The ventral surface is white.

#### Distribution

The Whale Shark has a broad distribution across most tropical and warm temperate seas. The best-known localities in Australia for the species are around Ningaloo Reef in north-western Australia. The species' distribution and status in waters around the Northern Territory (NT) is poorly known. Records have been collected from scattered localities along the NT coastline, particularly around Groote Eylandt.

The Whale Shark is migratory. Individuals from Western Australian are known to migrate to waters around Christmas Island and Indonesia. They also move more broadly around the Indian Ocean and towards the Philippines.

NT conservation reserves where reported: None



Known localities of the Whale Shark in the NT ([nrmaps.nt.gov.au](http://nrmaps.nt.gov.au))

#### Ecology and life-history

The Whale Shark feeds primarily by suction filter feeding and its diet includes a broad range of plankton, small crustaceans and small schooling fish. Whale Sharks may aggregate in nutrient-rich waters to feed on seasonal concentrations of tropical krill and small fish.

The species is extremely long-lived. Individuals reach sexual maturity when they are about 30 years old, and are estimated to live up to 100 years.

## Threatening processes

The main threat to the Whale Shark is targeted commercial fishing and unregulated hunting (operating outside Australian waters) of individuals that seasonally visit Australian waters. Within Australian waters, the main recognised threats are reduction in food resources, disturbance by tourists and illegal fishing<sup>1</sup>.

## Conservation objectives and management

A national recovery plan for the Whale Shark was established in 2005<sup>1</sup>. It includes actions to increase levels of international cooperation for the conservation of the species, and to maintain and develop monitoring programs.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Department of the Environment and Heritage 2005. Whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) Recovery Plan, 2005-2010. Australian Government, Canberra.