



Press release: For immediate release

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Fiji Submits Proposal to List *Mobula* spp. under CITES Appendix II

Suva, Fiji. 24th December 2015

The Manta Trust is pleased to announce that the Government of Fiji have submitted a proposal to list all species of *Mobula* rays on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES*) at the next Conference of the Parties in 2016.

“Mobula rays are facing global population declines due to growing, unregulated international trade”, said Ms. Eleni Tokaduadua, Principle Environment Officer and Head of the Fijian CITES Management Authority. *“We recognise their economic value through sustainable means such as ecotourism, and encourage countries to support this proposal to ensure the survival of these species for generations to come”.*

Similar to the closely related manta rays (*Manta* spp.; listed under CITES Appendix II in 2013), *Mobula* grow slowly, mature late, and produce few offspring over long lifetimes. This life history strategy, coupled with their migratory nature and inherent schooling behaviour, makes these species extremely vulnerable to overexploitation.

Escalating demand for dried *Mobula* gill plates for use in Chinese medicine, as well as meat and cartilage, has led to targeting of these vulnerable species through fisheries that are largely unregulated and unmonitored. Significant catch declines have been observed in a number of locations in the Indo-Pacific, Eastern Pacific, and Indian Ocean regions, often despite evidence of increased fishing effort. Population declines are likely occurring in other locations, but have gone unnoticed.

“As a small island nation, all marine resources are incredibly valuable to Fiji and we recognise the need to improve protections for slow-growing and vulnerable species such as Mobula rays”, said Mr. Aisake Batibasaga, Director Fisheries at the Fijian Ministry of Fisheries and Forest. *“A CITES Appendix II listing will ensure that all international trade of these species is sustainably managed”.*

Listing these species on Appendix II of CITES would greatly enhance protection of vulnerable mobula rays by ensuring that all international trade is sustainably managed through science-based export limits and build upon the listing of these species under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) just last November, also proposed by the Government of Fiji.



The Fijian Delegation in November 2014 after the successful listing of *Mobula* spp. under CMS Appendix I and II. **Left to right:** Ms. Saras Sharma, Mr. Aisake Batibasaga, Mr. Arthur Sokimi, Mr. Ian Campbell

*“We congratulate the Government of Fiji for taking these significant steps to protect *Mobula* rays”, said Daniel Fernando, Associate Director of The Manta Trust. “We are fully committed to supporting Fiji to ensure the success of this proposal and to assist all nations with implementation of such a listing”.*

A CITES Appendix II listing for all *Mobula* species would bolster national and regional protections, complement the CITES measures for *Manta* species and the CMS listing of all manta and mobula rays, encourage sustainable international trade, help determine trends in population, and contribute to implementation of the UN FAO International Plan of Action for Conservation and Management of Sharks.

“WWF welcome and strongly support this announcement by the Fijian Government. Fiji continues to show global leadership in shark and ray conservation following on from their successful conservation proposals to protect threatened species of manta and mobula rays at last year’s Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS)”, said Ian Campbell, Manager of WWF’s Global Shark and Ray Initiative.

Luke Warwick, Director of Pew Shark Conservation said: *“This initiative undertaken by the Government of Fiji, along with the thresher and silky shark proposals submitted by the Government of Sri Lanka and the Government of the Maldives respectively, will help ensure these vulnerable marine species are traded at sustainable levels, and provide wild stocks the opportunity to replenish and maintain a state of equilibrium”.*

The Manta Trust would like to thank the Government of Fiji for taking this decisive step to improve the protection of mobula rays all around the world.

Notes:

*CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Presently 181 nations are party to CITES. The treaty, drawn up in 1973, is an international agreement to which States (countries) adhere voluntarily. Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties – in other words they have to implement the Convention – it does not take the place of national laws. Rather it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level. Species listed on CITES will be listed on one of three appendices. Appendix II (which now includes manta rays) includes species in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival (i.e. sustainable trade).

For more information on manta and mobula rays see:

www.MantaTrust.org

Devils in Distress:

With endorsement from several international NGOs, The Manta Trust have produced a document entitled “Devils in Distress”, available online at: http://www.mantatrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Devils_in_Distress_brochure_v10_low-res.pdf



Mobula tarapacana with a diver in the Azores. Ecotourism is a vital and sustainable source of income from these species in certain regions of the world © **Tom Burd Photography**



Mobula japanica in the Maldives. This species is often encountered by scuba divers around the world © **Guy Stevens**