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Publication Review

Reviewed by Grace Mathew, CMFRI, Cochin

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Title : An Atlas on the Elasmobranch Fishery Resources of India

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Elasmobranchs in general are of vital ecological importance in the oceans that fulfill the role of apex predators in the food chain, helping the ecosystem strike a balance. But too many of them would eat away every other fish in the sea. To counter this, nature has made sure that there aren't too many of them in the world oceans by making them long lived, slow growing and late to reproduce, ensuring their numbers never grow too fast. However, it is these life traits that make elasmobranchs incredibly poor in withstanding increasing fishing pressure which has come about as a result of high demand for shark fins, liver, cartilage etc. Many sharks are oceanic, moving across oceans and across national boundaries. In the event of the present day drastic decline in numbers of the elasmobranchs due to overexploitation, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has listed several species of sharks in the Red list. Since many countries bordering the Atlantic and the Pacific ocean are adopting strict regulatory measures on trade of shark products, the elasmobranch resources of India are being overexploited. Biological information, size composition and resource characteristics of most of the exploited species of elasmobranchs are scanty except for a few species. It is in this context that the present

publication "An Atlas on the elasmobranch fishery resources of India" gains special relevance. In this publication which is very much timely, the authors have made concerted efforts to bring out all the information available on the fishery character-

istics, population characteristics as well as biological characteristics of maximum possible number of elasmobranchs in the Indian region from all possible sources - "information on species profile, field identification characters, taxonomic position, global distribution, depth of occurrence, biological parameters, present utilization and endangered/banned status were collected from past literature, from FAO Fishbase.org and from present observations of the authors" as the authors put it.

In this atlas a total of 84 species of elasmobranchs representing 47 species of sharks, 29 species of rays and 8 species of skates including 4 species of saw fishes are illustrated with the help of photographs/drawings. The field identification characters described along with synonyms for each species will be of much use for future researchers in this field. The resource abundance in the nearshore regions as well as beyond 200m depth along both the coasts of India described with the help of maps gives by far a realistic picture of the abundance by species along our coasts. The information provided in this atlas on elasmobranch fishery resources of India would be of help not only to future researchers and students but also to policy planners as a reference work.

