

Accidental catch of protected Widenose guitarfish released by the fisherfolk of Karwar, Karnataka



Widenose guitarfish release at Majali, Fish Landing Centre



Widenose guitarfish release at Aligadda fish landing centre, Karwar

In September 2025, during routine visits to fish landing centres, researchers from the ICAR- CMFRI observed two instances of incidental entanglement of the Widenose guitarfish, a species protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, following the 2022 amendment, due to a significant decline in its population. These incidents highlight the ongoing challenges in conserving such vulnerable species and the crucial role of awareness among the fisher communities.

The first incident occurred on 18th September 2025, during a visit to the Majali fish landing centre, where the accidental capture of two Widenose guitarfish (*Glaucostegus obtusus* (Müller & Henle, 1841)) in a gillnet landing was observed by the authors. Both specimens were mature females, measured 60 cm and 78 cm total length (TL) and were still alive at the time of landing. The fisherwomen were unaware of the protected status of the species, intended to sell the fish in the local market. Dr. Mahesh, accompanied by Mr. Nagaraj M. Durgekar, supportive

staff, seized the opportunity to raise awareness among other fisherwomen present at the beach. They emphasised the protected status of the species and encouraged the community to refrain from selling such fish, and convinced the fisherwomen to release them back to sea. They also urged that any accidentally caught guitarfish in the future should be released back into the sea.

A week later, on 26 September 2025, another unintended entanglement of a Widenose guitarfish occurred at Aligadda beach, Karwar. The fishermen who were aware of the protected status of the species promptly reported the incident to the ICAR-CMFRI. This opportunity was used to reinforce the protection status of the species among other fishermen at the landing centre and assist the fishermen in releasing a mature female measuring 107 cm back into the sea. To date the largest recorded specimen of this species, measuring 114 cm, was found off the coast of Goa. Dr. Mahesh noted that it is encouraging to see fishermen responding positively to awareness

efforts and voluntarily releasing protected species. He mentioned similar incidents in the past year, where two Widenose Guitarfish were released alive in Gokarna and Karwar, following awareness campaigns by CMFRI staff.

Originally, ten elasmobranch species were protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. In 2022, nine more species were added to this list, including: Bowmouth guitarfish, Clubnose guitarfish, Widenose guitarfish, Giant manta ray, Reef manta ray, Bottlenose wedgefish, Smoothnose wedgefish, Giant freshwater whipsnake and Dwarf sawfish. These species are now protected from capture, landing, or trade along the Indian coastline. Among them, the Widenose guitarfish is a small coastal elasmobranch, typically found in shallow waters and estuaries. It is vulnerable to incidental catch in gillnets, single-day trawlers, hook-and-line gear, and shore seine operations.

The conservation of the Widenose guitarfish is part of CMFRI's broader initiative to protect elasmobranch species along India's coasts. Dr. Mahesh

emphasised the importance of vigilance among fishers: any live accidental catch of a protected species must be released immediately, and dead specimens must be reported to the nearest Forest Department or State Fisheries Department. He emphasised that under no circumstances should there be any

sale or trade of these species, even if they are found dead post-landing. In conclusion, he reiterated the urgent need to enhance awareness about the newly protected species under the Wildlife Protection Act and called upon the fishing community to support conservation efforts by safely releasing

any such species caught unintentionally.

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