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Shark culling at a World Heritage site

Sharks that are protected from fishing in New Caledonia's Coral Sea reefs and lagoons — a World Heritage site since 2008 — are being subjected to a culling programme by the New Caledonian authorities to reduce attacks on tourists (see https://www.lemonde.fr/en/environment/article/2023/03/11/in-new-caledonia-shark-attacks-spark-controversy-over-culling-campaigns_6018913_114.html).

The culling of bull sharks (*Carcharhinus leucas*) and tiger sharks (*Galeocerdo cuvier*) has intensified since 2016, with tens to hundreds captured annually using baited horizontal drum lines and steel leaders. By-catch includes grey reef (*C. amblyrhynchos*), blacktip reef (*C. melanopterus*), sandbar (*C. plumbeus*), sharptooth lemon (*Negaprion acutidens*), tawny nurse (*Nebrius ferrugineus*) and scalloped hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*) sharks. Several of these are classed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List.

Shark culling in response to attacks on humans is considered environmentally irresponsible (see <https://www.nature.com/articles/nature.2013.14373>). Instead, scientists should work to identify any environmental or other changes that might trigger attacks — and seek non-lethal ways, backed by science, to avoid or manage them.

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