GREENLAND SHARK
*Somniosus microcephalus*

**SCIENTIFIC NAME**
*Somniosus microcephalus* (Bloch & Schneider, 1801)

**COMMON NAMES**
GREENLAND SHARK, Sleeper Shark, Large Sleeper Shark, Ground Shark, Eishai (DEU), Tiburón Boreal (ESP), Laimargue du Groenland (FRA), Squalo di Groenlandia (ITA), Groenlandse Haai (NLD), Tubarão-da-gronelândia (PRT).

**DISTRIBUTION**
Endemic to the North Atlantic and Arctic. Eastern Arctic and Atlantic from Russia and Norway to the North Sea and Ireland; occasionally recorded further south to Portugal.¹⁻⁴

**IDENTIFICATION AND COLOUR**
1. Heavyset cylindrical body with two, spineless dorsal fins.²⁻⁵
2. All precaudal fins small, no anal fin.²⁻⁵
3. Small eyes, commonly with visible copepod attached²⁻⁵⁻⁶
   - Uniform grey to medium brown.²⁻⁵
   - Sometimes with pattern of small dark and light spots/blotches; transverse dark bands can also be visible²⁻³⁻⁵

**SIZE AND BIOLOGY**
- **Birth:** 40–50cm.
- **Matures:** female 450cm; male 300cm.
- **Max. TL:** 640cm, possibly to 730cm.²
- **Age at maturity:** est. ~150 years (female).
- **Max. age:** suggested to be ≤400 years. Very slow growing.⁷
- **Viviparous, avg. of 7–10 pups per litter.²³⁻⁵
- **Generalist feeder, diet includes fishes, cephalopods and crustaceans.** Marine mammals often taken; unclear whether these are scavenged or actively targeted.²⁻³⁻⁵
- **The copepod *Ommatokoita elongata* present on the cornea of most Greenland Sharks’ eyes causes serious damage to the eye (incl. blindness). It does not seem to affect movements or ability to locate prey.²⁻³⁻⁵⁻⁶

**MAP**
- Global: NT
- Europe: NT
- Max. length: 640cm
GREENLAND SHARK

**TEETH**

- Upper jaw: 35–39; thin, sharp and lacking serrations.\(^2,3\)
- Lower jaw: 45–57; interlocking, broad and square with short, smooth cusps.\(^2,3\)

**SIMILAR SPECIES**

- **Little Sleeper Shark** *Somniosus rostratus*
- **Bluntnose Sixgill Shark** *Hexanchus griseus*

**HABITAT**

- Demersal to pelagic on continental and insular shelves and upper slopes; shallows to 1,400m, possibly to 2,647m.\(^2\)
- Prefers water temperature 0.6–12°C; majority of records from waters <5°C.\(^3,4\)
- Known to make large-scale (100–1000km) movements throughout the year. Migrates inshore during colder months at high latitudes. This behaviour is reversed at lower latitudes.\(^2,5,8\)

**CONSERVATION STATUS**

  Europe: Near Threatened (2015)
- Life history and population structure remains poorly known. This shark’s longevity and exceptionally slow growth coupled with possible historic population decline make it vulnerable to fishing pressure.\(^1\)

**COMMERCIAL IMPORTANCE**

- Historically targeted for its liver oil by large-scale industrial fisheries in Norway, Iceland and Greenland.\(^4\)
- Occasional bycatch in longline, trawl and gillnet fisheries; usually discarded.\(^1\)
- Targeted by artisanal fishers in Iceland and Greenland who utilise the meat, skin and teeth.\(^1-3\)
- Meat is toxic when fresh but eaten in some countries after being washed and cured. Hákarl, made from fermented Greenland Shark meat, is a traditional dish in Iceland.\(^1,4,8\)

**MANAGEMENT**

- Subject to prohibitions under the CFP, RFMO and FNA regulations.

**REFERENCES**

1. Burgess et al. 2015.
2. Ebert et al. 2013.
8. Campana et al. 2015.