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GREENPEACE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITES COP13
CITES, WILDLIFE TRADE AND THE THREAT TO GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY

POSITION STATEMENT 2004

humphead wrasse cheilinus undulatus

PROPOSAL 33

The Governments of Fiji, the Member States of the European Community, and the United States of America have submitted a proposal for the inclusion of the Humphead Wrasse in CITES Appendix II in response to the over exploitation of this species from international trade. This trade, compounded by the destruction and degradation of the fish's natural habitats of these fish and their natural biology, has led to extensive population decline.

GREENPEACE RECOMMENDS: **support proposal 33**

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trading away the planet

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HUMPHEAD WRASSE

CHEILINUS UNDULATUS

PROPOSAL

description

This large reef fish is found on coral reefs in the coastal waters of 48 countries and territories throughout the Pacific and Indian Oceans. It can live up to 30 years of age, reach over one metre in length and weigh up to 200 kg. Its late sexual maturity (five to seven years) makes it especially vulnerable to exploitation.

Historically the Humphead wrasse has been highly prized for its flavour and texture, and is considered in some areas to be a 'stately' or 'royal' fish, to be consumed only on special occasions or by the elite. Internationally, this species has a high economic value and is heavily sought by fishers and traders as part of the luxury food fish market. This status as a luxury food means that its market value is likely to increase as it becomes less readily available due to over-fishing, encouraging a downward spiral of over-exploitation and population decline.

Due to documented population declines, the Humphead wrasse has been listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, with proposed re-categorization as "Endangered" on the 2004 list. Despite this vulnerable status there are very few national and regional efforts to ensure the sustainable management of this species, and over-fishing and illegal trade continue.



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threats

over-fishing: The Humphead wrasse spawns in aggregations that are easily targeted by fishers, which means they are especially vulnerable to over-fishing during times of reproduction.

"plate-sized" juveniles: The preferential size for this fish in the food export trade is "plate-sized" – between about 30-60 cm in length. "Plate-sized" fish are generally sexually immature as sexual maturity occurs at about 50 cm. Large numbers of these juvenile fish are removed from the wild for the live reef food fish trade, and are therefore unable to reproduce the next generation to replenish exploited populations.

cyanide fishing: Cyanide is widely used to catch this species by traders of live reef fish, especially in Indonesia and the Philippines. The use of this poison as a fishing method is highly destructive and is known to kill living coral. Humphead wrasses, like many other reef fish and invertebrate species, depend on healthy coral reefs for shelter. Loss of habitat severely affects reef communities and their abundance.

illegal activities: Fisheries of this species are often linked to illegal activities, such as night fishing, cyanide and fishing without permits in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia.

live reef food fish trade: The Humphead wrasse is among the most highly priced of all fish species in the international trade of live reef food fish in Southeast Asia, and prices can reach up to US\$175 per kg in Hong Kong. These fish are mainly exported from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and some western Pacific Islands. The major importing countries are China, Taiwan and Singapore. Hong Kong is the biggest consumer/trans-shipment centre for the live seafood market, including the Humphead wrasse, and re-exports significant volumes of this fish mainly to mainland China.

benefits of cites appendix II listing

A proposal to include the Humphead Wrasse on Appendix II of CITES was submitted to the 12th CITES COP in November 2002, where it was narrowly defeated. This proposal has been re-tabled because international trade continues to be the main cause of declining populations.

This species meets the criteria for Appendix II listing as it is internationally traded, and this trade is having a detrimental impact on wild populations. Humphead wrasse fisheries are essentially unmanaged, and monitoring is urgently needed both for local capture and international trade in order to ensure that capture rates and quotas are sustainable. An Appendix II listing would trigger better monitoring of this capture and trade, support coastal states in domestic measures, assist in eliminating illegal trade and would complement regional management initiatives.

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