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Introduction

Marine recreational fishing is an important social, cultural and economic activity in south-eastern Spain, although little is yet known about its impact on vulnerable species. The aim of this study is to characterise recreational anglers, assess their interactions with elasmobranchs and other vulnerable species, and analyse catch patterns. To this end, data collected over five years during a single surfcasting competition have been used.

Study area



Figure 1. Study area

Results

Male participants dominated the sample (93%), with females accounting for 7%.

Surveyed fishers showed high fishing experience but comparatively lower competition experience (Figure 2).

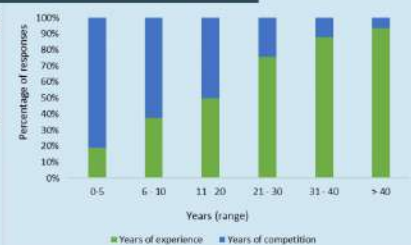


Figure 2. Fishing and competition experience of surveyed fishers

Materials & Methods

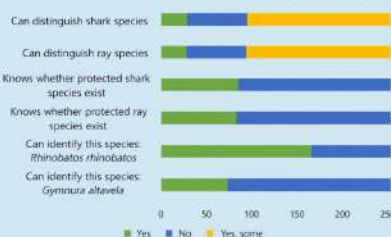


Figure 3. Elasmobranch knowledge and identification

Fishers exhibited limited taxonomic knowledge and low awareness of protected shark and ray species (Figure 3).

Discussion

Shore-based recreational fishing in southeastern Spain is a well-established activity characterized by highly experienced fishers and regular participation in organized competitions. Although interactions with elasmobranchs, particularly rays, were relatively frequent, knowledge of these species and their conservation status remained limited. Catches were dominated by common Mediterranean coastal species, while elasmobranch occurrences were scarce, suggesting a low direct pressure on this group. Overall, the results highlight the need for targeted educational initiatives and demonstrate the potential of fishing competitions as valuable sources of ecological and social information to support conservation efforts.

Previous interactions with elasmobranchs were common among participants: 43% rays, 4% sharks, 21% both groups, whereas 32% reported never having caught an elasmobranch.

Fish catches were dominated by a few coastal species, particularly *Oblada melanurus*, *Diplodus annularis*, and *Boops boops*, while most species exhibited low relative abundances. Significant spatial and temporal variability in catch composition reflected the ecological complexity of Mediterranean coastal ecosystems (Figure 4).

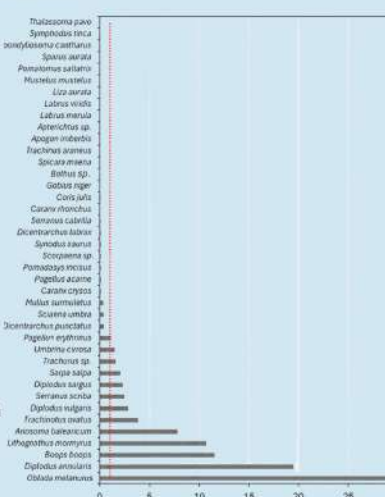


Figure 4. Relative abundance distribution of species recorded

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