

## Biodiversity aspects of endemic catsharks- a genetic assessment

A.E. van der Merwe (Bester), Stellenbosch University  
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The endemic catsharks are a prominent component of nearshore marine communities in South Africa. These species are different to the majority of catshark species due to their presence on shallow, inshore reefs, whereas other catsharks usually occur in offshore, deeper waters. In the light of global change, these sharks are at greater risk from exposure to threats from human activities including habitat destruction, pollution and commercial and recreational fisheries. Due to their inshore habitat use and restricted distribution, taxonomic clarity and correct delineation of the species' distribution of this group is paramount, particularly for *H. kistnasamyi*, as it is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN redlist. Additionally, there is limited data available for the leopard catshark, *Poroderma pantherium*, and it is listed as data deficient using the IUCN red list of threatened species criteria, largely due to concern over fragmented populations. Generating and mobilising population genetics and barcoding data for the *Haploblepharus* and *Poroderma* species will not only assist in meeting targets for the Foundational Biodiversity Information Program, but will also have significant conservation outcomes.

There is little to no information beyond the basic biology and reproductive studies for many of these species in South African waters. This study is unique from the majority of South African shark research as the focus is on the lesser studied species that data is urgently needed for. We will address the gaps in knowledge and attempt to clarify taxonomy issues such as those found in the shysharks through a combination of morphometrics and molecular techniques.