

TARGETING SHARK CONSERVATION

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OUR POSITION

URGENT NEED FOR SHARK CONSERVATION

Sharks caught in high-seas fisheries are among the oceans' most vulnerable animals. Their low reproductive rates make them particularly susceptible to overfishing in the face of increased demand for shark products. More than half of the shark species taken in high-seas fisheries are classified as *Endangered*, *Vulnerable* or *Near Threatened* by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

The United Nations has passed eight Resolutions calling on Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs) to improve the management of shark fisheries. The U.N. International Plan of Action for Sharks called on RFMOs more than a decade ago to develop regional plans of action to conserve sharks.

Despite these facts, there are still no international limits on high-seas shark catch rates, and loopholes hamper the enforcement of international bans on "finning"—the wasteful practice of slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea. Depletion of these key predators risks the health of entire ocean ecosystems.

This week's meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) provides an important opportunity to improve the outlook for Atlantic sharks through concrete actions to limit their exploitation.

WORLD'S FISHERIES MANAGERS AGREE

In June 2009, delegates to the second joint meeting of the tuna RFMOs agreed to the following directive for sharks:

"Consistent with the FAO [U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization] International Plan of Action for Sharks (IPOA-Sharks), establish precautionary, science based conservation and management measures for sharks taken in fisheries within the convention areas of each tuna RFMO, including as appropriate:

- Measures to improve the enforcement of existing finning bans;
- Prohibitions on retention of particularly vulnerable or depleted shark species, based on advice from scientists and experts;

HALF OF OPEN OCEAN SHARKS ARE THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

Protect them now before it's too late

Matt Rand, Coordinator, Shark Alliance; Director of Global Shark Conservation, Pew Environment Group
p: +1-202-285-4859 e: mrand@pewtrusts.org Skype: matt.rand

- Concrete management measures in line with best available scientific advice with priority given to overfished populations;
- Precautionary fishing controls on a provisional basis for shark species for which there is no scientific advice; and
- Measures to improve the provision of data on sharks in all fisheries and by all gears."

PRIORITY ACTION—Follow-Up Action by ICCAT

ICCAT was the first RFMO to ban shark finning, mandate shark catch data reporting and convene international shark stock assessments. With this record and associated advice, ICCAT is well-positioned to take the lead in implementing the directive from the second joint tuna RFMO meeting.

Specifically, at this year's annual ICCAT meeting, the Shark Alliance and the Pew Environment Group call on ICCAT Parties to agree to:

- A prohibition on the removal of shark fins at sea in order to improve enforcement of the shark finning ban and facilitate collection of species-specific catch data;
- Prohibitions on retention of exceptionally vulnerable shark species, particularly the bigeye thresher, as recommended by ICCAT scientists;
- Concrete limits that would significantly reduce fishing pressure on overfished North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks, in line with previous ICCAT Recommendations;
- Precautionary measures to cap fishing for blue sharks to prevent overfishing;
- Mechanisms to improve compliance with shark data collection mandates; and
- An ambitious schedule for hosting a special porbeagle shark management meeting of representatives from interested RFMOs, as resolved in 2008.

