



**MEDIA BRIEFING NOTES**  
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## **THE SHARK ALLIANCE WELCOMES PROMPT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY PLAN OF ACTION FOR SHARKS**

### **Overview**

Ten years ago, in response to growing concern over depletion of the world's shark populations, governments of the United Nations adopted an *International Plan of Action for Sharks*\* and with it pledged to produce shark conservation plans for their waters and fishing regions. After more than a year of consultation, in early February 2009, the European Commission released its *European Community Plan of Action for Sharks*. The Plan aims to improve information on shark fisheries, biology and trade, stop overfishing, and prevent "finning" (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea).

The Shark Alliance was formed in 2006 to promote the development of a sound, science-based EU Shark Plan. The coalition has supported most of the actions set forth in the Plan, with a focus on securing clear mandates for protecting endangered species, heeding scientific advice for fishing limits, closing loopholes in the finning ban, and including wildlife treaties as options to enhance shark conservation.

Implementation of the EU Shark Plan is needed to achieve recovery of threatened shark populations, sustainable shark fisheries, and an effective ban on shark finning, and thereby key to securing a brighter future for some of Europe's most vulnerable and neglected animals.

### **The Problem**

Most sharks are particularly vulnerable to overfishing because they grow slowly, mature late and produce few young. For many reasons, sharks have been a low priority for managers. Fishermen from many EU countries - including Spain, France, Portugal and the UK - target sharks, but EU limits on shark fishing are either non-existent or lenient. Incidental catches of sharks are also significant. Serious gaps remain in our understanding of shark biology and the recording of shark catches. As a result of these factors, most European shark populations declining; one-third of assessed species are classified by IUCN as *Threatened* with extinction. Spain is one of the world's largest traders of shark fins while the EU ban on finning is the weakest in the world.

### **The Solution**

To turn the tide, avoid the loss of shark populations, and ensure sustainable fisheries, the EU needs science-based shark fishing limits, endangered species protection, and a stronger finning ban, in addition to improved shark data collection. The Plan commits to these improvements, but must be followed by amendments to existing regulations (particularly the finning ban), improvement in the annual EU fishing quota setting process (through better adherence to scientific advice and the addition of shark species subject to fishing limits), and complementary international initiatives (such as efforts to restrict international trade in shark parts and establish regional conservation plans for threatened species).

### **The Process**

The European Commission released the final EU Shark Plan on February 5<sup>th</sup>. EU Member State representatives will deliver their official response through "Council Conclusions" and an exchange of views at the April 23-24 Fisheries Council meeting. All EU Member States were able to have a say in the formation of the Council Conclusions and can make a statement about the Shark Plan at the April meeting.

The Shark Alliance has called on all EU Fisheries Ministers to strive for Council Conclusions that urge prompt implementation of the Shark Plan in line with scientific advice and the precautionary approach. The Commission should work immediately to improve EU shark policies, starting with a proposal to strengthen the finning ban. We are tracking related reactions and activities of Member States at [www.sharkalliance.org](http://www.sharkalliance.org).

\* In the IPOA & the document, the term "shark" is used to describe all species of cartilaginous fishes: sharks, skates, rays & chimaeras.