



POSITION ON CITES SHARK PROPOSALS

Of the 591 shark and ray species assessed by scientists with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 21 percent are threatened with extinction and 18 percent have a near-threatened status. Just as troubling, researchers lack adequate information on 35 percent of sharks and rays to make accurate population assessments.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that more than half of highly migratory sharks are either over-exploited or depleted. Shark fishing is driven by the demand for shark fins, used in the delicacy shark fin soup. Approximately 73 million sharks are killed annually to support the international fin trade. Sharks are also caught for their meat and for other products. International trade of this magnitude is problematic, because sharks tend to grow slowly, mature late and produce few young over their lifetimes, leaving them exceptionally vulnerable to over-exploitation. Shark populations are slow to recover from depletion, and removal of these key predators risks the health of entire ocean ecosystems.

Never before have so many shark species—including three of the distinctive hammerheads—been proposed for consideration at CITES. The Pew Environment Group considers that the four shark proposals meet the criteria for inclusion in CITES Appendix II. Such listings will complement and reinforce fisheries management measures, provide much needed data and monitoring of trade and also contribute to implementation of the FAO International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks.

We urge all CITES Parties to support these proposals at CoP15.

Proposal 15: Scalloped hammerhead

Hammerhead shark fins are highly sought after for shark fin soup because of their large size and the high “needle count,” or fibers, that make up the fin. Globally distributed, scalloped hammerhead sharks are classified by the IUCN as “Endangered.” Four other shark species (smooth hammerhead, great hammerhead, sandbar and dusky sharks) are included in this proposal as look-alike species because their fins are not easily distinguished from scalloped hammerhead fins.

Proposal 16: Oceanic whitetip

This species is noted for its large, rounded fins, usually tipped with white. Oceanic whitetip sharks are threatened by harvest for the international fin trade and as bycatch in commercial fisheries. Oceanic whitetip sharks are listed on the IUCN Red List as “Critically Endangered” in the Northwest and Central Atlantic Ocean and “Vulnerable” globally.

Proposal 17: Porbeagle

Porbeagle meat is considered high quality, particularly in Europe, and fins are also in demand. The porbeagle is listed on the IUCN Red List as “Vulnerable” globally, “Endangered” in the Northwest Atlantic and “Critically Endangered” in the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea.

Proposal 18: Spiny dogfish

This species is subject to unsustainable fisheries in several parts of its range because of strong international demand for its meat, primarily from Europe, although dogfish fins also enter international trade. Spiny dogfish are listed on the IUCN Red List as “Vulnerable” on a global basis.

RECOMMENDATION: Support all shark proposals at CITES CoP15, an unprecedented opportunity for action.