



Media Advisory
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Historic Shark Protection Decisions on December EU Council Agenda

Ministers grapple with proposals to end fishing for six endangered shark and ray species

In the run-up to the infamous December meeting of the European Council of Ministers, the Shark Alliance is calling on Fisheries Ministers to adopt proposals from the European Commission to protect endangered sharks and rays. Final decisions on these and most other EU 2009 fishing limits will be made Thursday and Friday of this week in Brussels.

The proposals

Based on scientific advice, the European Commission has proposed to:

- Cut current EU catch limits for spurdog (spiny dogfish) and porbeagle sharks to *zero*;
- Prohibit fishermen from keeping three exceptionally depleted species of rays (common skate, undulate ray & white skate) caught in the NE Atlantic; and
- Fully protect the exceedingly rare angel shark throughout all EU waters.

The significance

With these proposals, the Commission has gone further for sharks and rays than for any other EU fish. Such action is warranted by these species' exceptional vulnerability and level of depletion.

Porbeagle and spurdog are the only fish proposed for zero catch limits throughout the Northeast Atlantic in 2009. If accepted, these limits would be a first for this type of widespread protection.

Protection for angel sharks is proposed for *all EU waters* including the Mediterranean; such action would be extraordinary as most EU fishing limits apply only to the Northeast Atlantic.

Commenting on the upcoming decisions, Sonja Fordham, Shark Alliance Policy Director said:

"At long last, the European Commission has proposed shark and ray fishing restrictions that are fully in line with the recommendations of their scientists and stand to redefine the EU's poor reputation with regard to shark conservation. The fate of Europe's most endangered sharks and rays now lies with the European Council of Ministers. We urge them to choose recovery over continued devastation by adopting the Commission's solid proposals for shark protection."

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Notes to Editors:

The Shark Alliance is a coalition of 60 conservation, scientific and recreational organizations dedicated to improving European policies with respect to sharks.

The International Council for Exploration of the Seas (ICES), which provides scientific advice to the Commission, has long warned of **spurdog** population collapse and recommended zero take of the species. Spurdog are sold as fish and chips in the UK and as smoked belly flaps in Germany; filets are eaten in other EU countries including Belgium, France, and Italy. Female spurdog remain pregnant for nearly two years, a record in the animal kingdom. Fisheries often target aggregations of pregnant females as they grow larger and fetch higher prices than males. The UK received the greatest share of 2008 EU spurdog quotas which totaled 2,585 tonnes (t) and are meant to allow for incidental catches only. Spurdog are categorized by IUCN as *Critically Endangered* in the Northeast Atlantic.

EU fishing for the large and highly migratory **porbeagle shark** was not limited until 2008 and current quotas (581t total) are too high to rebuild the population. France and Spain are responsible for the bulk of EU porbeagle catches, which are driven by European demand for meat and Asian demand for shark fin soup.

France is home to the only remaining targeted fishery for porbeagle; French officials are actively opposing the Commission's proposal for a zero TAC. The UK, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, Portugal and Germany also have porbeagle quota shares. ICES scientists have repeatedly advised that fishing for porbeagles should not be allowed, but recently strengthened that advice by calling for a prohibition on porbeagle landings. Porbeagle sharks are classified by IUCN as *Critically Endangered* in the Northeast Atlantic.

Earlier this year, ICES warned of severe depletion and local extinction of the bottom-dwelling **angel shark** and **white skates** and recommended that these species receive the "highest possible protection". ICES also called for an end to fishing **for undulate rays** and **common skates**. Common skate, angel sharks and white skates are listed by IUCN as *Critically Endangered*; undulate rays are classified as *Endangered*.

Most sharks (and closely related rays) grow slowly, mature late and produce few young; these characteristics make the especially vulnerable to overfishing and slow to recover once depleted.

The EU has proposed listing both spurdog and porbeagle sharks under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). In unsuccessful arguments for CITES action in 2007, the EU pledged to do a better job of conserving spurdog and porbeagle in EU waters. The Parties to CMS agreed to list spurdog and porbeagle sharks under CMS Appendix II in early December.