



Shark fisheries and trade in Europe Portuguese edition

Shark fisheries in Europe

- Europe includes some of the most important shark fishing nations in the world¹. Between 1990 and 2003, the global reported catch of sharks increased by 22 per cent, 80 per cent of which was taken by 20 countries – which included Spain, Portugal, the UK and France².
- According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (UN FAO) data, European Union (EU) countries caught nearly 100,000 metric tons (t) of shark (including rays and chimaeras) in 2005. Spain took the largest share at around 40 per cent of the EU total, followed by France (22 per cent) and Portugal³.

The Portuguese situation

- In 2005, according to FAO data, Portuguese vessels took 15,360t of sharks, mainly from the Atlantic (13,385t) and the Indian Ocean (1,975t)⁴. Blue sharks made up most of the catch (more than 50 per cent), followed by rays, shortfin mako sharks and some deepwater shark species, such as leafscale gulper sharks and Portuguese dogfish⁵.
- In a letter to the environmental organisation Oceana, however, the Portuguese Directorate of Fisheries confirmed shark catches by Portuguese vessels in 2005 of nearly 100,000t. That is more than six times the amount of catches officially reported to the FAO and would almost double the known total EU catches.
- With 30 vessels, Portugal has the second largest surface longline fleet in the EU. Sharks, mainly blue, mako, hammerhead and threshers, make up more than 80 per cent of its catch.
- All three species of thresher and shortfin mako sharks are considered Vulnerable globally by the IUCN Shark Specialist Group, based on Red List Criteria, while several species of hammerhead shark are proposed to be listed as Endangered. The blue shark, potentially the world's most abundant and heavily fished pelagic shark, is considered Near Threatened globally, while the Northeast Atlantic population is being proposed as Vulnerable, based on declines of 50–70 per cent.

¹ IUCN, (2003). *Shark Finning. Information Paper*. IUCN (World Conservation Union). Available at: <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/organizations/ssg/finning.htm>

² Lack, M. and G. Sant, (2006). *World Shark Catch, Production & Trade 1990–2003*. Australian Government, Department of the Environment and Heritage, and TRAFFIC Oceania.

³ FAO Fisheries Department, *Fishery Information, Data and Statistics Unit, Fishstat plus. Universal software for fishery statistical time series. Catches and landings 2004*.

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

Shark finning

- Shark finning is the wasteful practice of slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea. The lucrative, global market for shark fins, used for the Asian delicacy 'shark fin soup', is estimated to be increasing as China's economy booms.
- Over the last decade, European participation in the Hong Kong fin market has increased from negligible levels in the early 1990s to nearly one-third of total declared imports.
- In 2003, in an effort to prevent shark finning, the EU banned the removal of shark fins on-board vessels. Exceptions to this ban are granted through special fishing permits which require that shark carcasses must be retained and fins can weigh no more than 5 per cent of the weight of the whole shark.
- The EU Shark Finning Regulation also allows the separate landing of fins and carcasses and the trans-shipment of fins, creating a significant enforcement loophole.
- In 2007, the Portuguese government issued 34 special fishing permits. These were partly issued to surface longliners, which catch pelagic sharks such as blue shark and mako shark in a targeted fishery, and partly to vessels using gillnets that target deep-sea sharks or catch deep-sea sharks in a mixed gillnet fishery.

Shark consumption and trade

- EU countries are a major force in the global shark trade. In 2004, Europe imported more than 26,000t of shark meat, representing nearly 30 per cent of the world's shark imports. In the same year, EU countries exported more than 40,000t of shark meat and products – nearly 40 per cent of total world shark exports⁶. In 2006, the situation changed with the EU importing more sharks than exporting: EU countries imported more than 40,000t of shark products and exported nearly 34,000t.
- Portugal is a relatively minor importer and exporter of shark products. In 2006, Portuguese companies imported 3,011t of shark products and exported 2,215t.

Shark management in European waters and adjacent seas

- In 1999, the EU and most of the world's fishing nations adopted the UN FAO's International Plan of Action for Sharks (IPOA-Sharks), which highlighted the vulnerability of sharks and pledged to develop national and regional plans of action to conserve them. Eight years later, the EU is still without a shark plan. One-third of Europe's shark, skate and ray populations are considered Threatened, according to the IUCN, and yet the EU restricts fishing for only a few of these species. Many species of sharks, including those that dominate Portuguese catches, migrate into international waters – yet there are no ocean-wide limits on shark catch.

⁶ FAO Fisheries Department, *Fishery Information, Data and Statistics Unit, Fishstat plus. Universal software for fishery statistical time series. Commodities and trade 2004.*

What Portugal can do to help sharks

As the third largest shark fishing nation in Europe, Portugal has a responsibility to ensure proper fisheries management and conservation programmes for sharks. Portugal should:

- press the EU Commission to promptly develop the overdue EU shark plan of action, thereby helping to ensure that sharks receive the attention required for effective conservation and sustainable fisheries;
- set an example for other EU Member States by ending exceptions to the EU ban on the on-board removal of shark fins and discontinue the issuing of special fishing permits;
- actively promote EU proposals to restrict international trade in endangered spiny dogfish and porbeagle sharks through listing under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) up to and throughout the Conference of the CITES Parties in June 2007;
- urge the European Community to propose science-based, precautionary limits on shark fishing to international fisheries bodies.