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NEW FRENCH GOVERNMENT URGED TO HELP CURB TRADE IN ENDANGERED SHARKS

Conservationists call on France to promote EU proposals to list spiny dogfish and porbeagle sharks under Washington Convention (CITES)

May 30, Paris. WWF and the Shark Alliance are urging the new French government to seize a fleeting opportunity for landmark protection of two species of imperilled sharks at the upcoming meeting of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), also known as the Washington Convention, by reaching out to other governments and actively promoting EU proposals for the shark conservation action.

The EU has proposed listing spiny dogfish and porbeagle sharks under CITES Appendix II in order to limit trade in their meat and fins. CITES Parties will debate and vote on the proposals at their June 3-15 meeting at The Hague.

“With a new government committed to natural resource conservation, France is well poised to add fresh energy to this initiative and lead the way toward a brighter future for sharks,” said Sonja Fordham, Policy Director for the Shark Alliance. “Listing spiny dogfish and porbeagle sharks under CITES is warranted and urgently needed, yet still an uphill battle. We urge France to use its influence to highlight the merits of the EU shark proposals and encourage CITES action before it’s too late.”

These two shark species have been overfished to serious depletion and are now considered globally Threatened by the IUCN. Populations in the Northwest and Northeast Atlantic classify as Endangered and Critically Endangered, respectively, under IUCN Red List criteria. The EU listing proposals were spearheaded by Germany as a means to hold international trade in these species to sustainable levels. The proposals have been endorsed by experts and the CITES Secretariat, but face stiff opposition from Asia, the core of shark fin demand, and have yet to be supported by the U.S. and Canada, where the species are fished.

Spiny dogfish are imported from all corners of the globe to satisfy European demand for fish and chips and smoked belly flaps. Porbeagle meat is among the most prized in Europe while fins are exported to Asia for use in shark fin soup. France is the largest importer of spiny dogfish in the world and French fishermen operate the only targeted fishery for porbeagle sharks in EU waters.

“As a leading producer and consumer of spiny dogfish and porbeagle sharks, France has a responsibility to also lead on conservation initiatives for these imperilled species,” said Stéphane Ringuet, chargé de programme Traffic, WWF-France. “The value of these sharks’ parts and pressure on their vulnerable populations are on the rise. Limiting international trade to sustainable levels, as a CITES Appendix II listing would do, is essential to safeguarding these species in the North Atlantic and around the world.”

For further information contact Nicole Aussedat on tel: : +33 (0)6 74 87 75 43