

## Fact Sheet: SHARK CONSUMPTION, TRADE & FISHING IN ITALY

### Overview

As one of the world's top importers of sharks, Italy is in a good position to encourage improvements in the sustainability of these exceptionally slow growing species. Substantial progress, particularly in Europe, is needed before most sharks can be considered sustainable seafood. Currently, Italy protects no more shark species than does the EU, and EU shark management is among the world's most lenient. Better controls on fishing for other, more popular marine fish – such as tuna and flounder -- would also help sharks recover. Consumers can help by making informed seafood selections and asking policy makers to safeguard sharks.

### Shark Consumption & Trade

The European Union (EU) is a significant consumer and trader of sharks. EU countries imported more than 26,000t of shark meat -- nearly 30% of the world's shark imports -- in 2004. The same year, EU countries exported more than 40,000t of shark meat, fins and other products, just under 40% of world shark exports<sup>1</sup>.

Italy is consistently among the top importers of sharks. In 2005, Italy ranked third in the world, responsible for more than 10% of global shark imports<sup>2</sup>. These imports consist mainly of frozen, chilled and fresh shark meat and fillets of dogfish, porbeagle, smoothhounds, catsharks and makos<sup>3</sup>.

Mako shark, a preferred species, is sold in Italy as *smoriglio*. Sharks are also marketed to Italians as *palombo*, *can bianco*, *cagneto*, *missola*, *pallouna*, *nizza*, *stera*, *cagnolo*, *penna*, *vitello di mare*, *gattucci*, *spinaroli* and *cani spellati*. Blue sharks are reportedly sold as more valuable smoothhounds (*palombo*) while porbeagle and mako are sold as the more prized *pesce spada* (swordfish)<sup>4</sup>.

### Shark Fisheries

Europe is home to some of the most important shark fishing nations in the world. EU countries – mainly Spain, France, Portugal and the UK -- take about 100,000 metric tons (t) of sharks per year. EU vessels fish sharks all over the world; almost half of EU shark catch comes from outside EU waters. Over the last two decades, global shark catch has generally increased while European shark catch has declined.

Italy leads EU countries in catch of Mediterranean sharks. In 2004, Italy's reported shark catch was more than 1,000t, down significantly from the 1994 peak of 16,500t<sup>5</sup>. Pelagic (open ocean) sharks such as mako, blue, thresher and porbeagle sharks are taken in Mediterranean longline, gillnet and illegal driftnet fisheries. Although the primary target of such fisheries is usually swordfish or tuna, sharks often account for a large proportion of the catch. Other shark species taken in Mediterranean fisheries include sixgills, sevengills, smoothhounds, catsharks, dogfish, tope, nursehounds and deepwater gulper sharks<sup>6</sup>.

### Shark Population Status

More than 80 species of sharks and rays have been recorded from the Mediterranean<sup>7</sup>. The IUCN has classified 42% of 71 Mediterranean shark and ray species assessed *Threatened* with extinction (classified as *Vulnerable*, *Endangered* or *Critically Endangered* on the IUCN *Red List*). This percentage is higher than those for all other regions assessed. For EU waters overall, about a third of shark species are *Threatened*.

<sup>1</sup> FAO Fisheries Department. Fishery Information, Data and Statistics Unit, Fishstat plus. Universal software for fishery statistical time series. Commodities and trade. 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Lack, M. and Sant, G. 2008. Illegal, unreported and unregulated shark catch. Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts and TRAFFIC, Canberra.

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat. Comext database, external trade.

<sup>4</sup> Vannuccini, S. 1999. *Shark Utilization, Marketing and Trade*. FAO Fisheries Technical Paper 389. Rome.

<sup>5</sup> FAO Fisheries Department, Fishery Information, Data and Statistics Unit, Fishstat plus. Universal software for fishery statistical time series. Catches and landings. 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Serena, F. 2005. *Field identification guide to the sharks and rays of the Mediterranean and Black Sea*. FAO Species Identification Guide for Fishery Purposes. Rome.

<sup>7</sup> Abdulla, A. 2004. Status and Conservation of Sharks in the Mediterranean Sea. IUCN Technical Paper.

Species categorised by IUCN as *Critically Endangered* in the Mediterranean include the porbeagle shark, three types of angel shark, three species of skates, angular rough shark, shortfin mako, and the sand tiger shark. The Mediterranean smalltooth sand tiger, sandbar shark, spiny dogfish, giant devil ray, and great white shark are considered *Endangered*. Basking sharks, smooth hammerheads, gulper sharks, threshers and blue sharks and two species of smoothhounds are considered *Vulnerable* in the region<sup>8</sup>.

In 2008, scientists reported population declines of 97-99% for Mediterranean populations of hammerheads, threshers, porbeagles, makos and blue sharks<sup>9</sup>. Shark species diversity in the Adriatic Sea and Gulf of Lion has dropped by an estimated 50% over the last five decades due to fishing pressure<sup>10</sup>.

### **Regional Shark Conservation**

Despite these statistics and the 2003 completion of a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) *Mediterranean Action Plan for the Conservation of Cartilaginous Fishes*, most Mediterranean sharks remain completely unprotected from overfishing. Unlike some EU countries (including Malta), Italy does not protect any shark species nationally. The only sharks to receive EU protection in the Mediterranean are basking, white and angel sharks. Mediterranean catch of other shark species is not regulated. There are no EU or international catch limits for blue sharks, makos, threshers, catsharks, smoothhounds, nursehounds, tope, six or seven-gill sharks. EU catches of Northeast Atlantic spiny dogfish, porbeagle and deepwater sharks are limited, but at levels above scientific advice (zero). "Finning" (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea) is prohibited for all EU vessels and waters, but enforcement methods are lenient. Implementation of a new Community Plan of Action for Sharks could vastly improve this situation.

The Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea lists great whites, basking sharks and giant devil rays as endangered or threatened species and shortfin mako, porbeagle, blue shark, angel shark and white skate as species for which exploitation should be regulated. Trade in basking and white sharks is regulated through the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). These two species, as well as mako sharks, spiny dogfish and porbeagles are listed under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), but intended regional conservation agreements have not yet been initiated.

### **Sharks as Sustainable Seafood?**

A few shark fisheries in other parts of the world are well managed, but fishing on the vast majority of shark populations is unregulated or inadequately limited. Sharks are also generally more vulnerable to overfishing than other fish because of slow growth and few young. As a result, shark depletion is widespread and in many cases severe, and sharks are rarely suggested as environmentally friendly seafood choices. Although management of EU shark fishing is improving and not all European shark populations are decreasing, no European shark species are currently well-managed. Science-based limits on catch are the key to seafood sustainability; there are currently no such limits for legally taken sharks at Italian, EU or international levels.

### **How you can help**

- Ask questions about your seafood and choose options that come from sustainable sources.
- Talk to marketers about your concerns and ask them to help encourage sound shark fishing limits.
- Contact Luca Zaia, Minister of Agriculture and Forests, (Ministero delle Politiche Agricole Alimentari e Forestali Via XX Settembre, 00187 Rome; ministro.staff@politicheagricole.it) and request:
  - national protections for Italy's *Threatened* shark species;
  - prompt implementation of EU and Mediterranean Shark Action Plans; and
  - pressure on the European Commission to propose improvements to the EU finning ban.

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<sup>8</sup> Cavanagh, R.D. and Gibson, C. 2007. Overview of the Conservation Status of Cartilaginous Fishes in the Mediterranean Sea. IUCN, Gland and Malaga.

<sup>9</sup> Ferretti, F., Myers, R.A., Serena, F. and Lotze, H.K. 2008. Loss of Large Predatory Sharks from the Mediterranean Sea. *Conservation Biology* 22: 952-964.

<sup>10</sup> Ferretti, F., Myers, R.A., Sartor, P. and Serena, F. 2005. Long Term Dynamics of the Chondrichthyan Fish Community in Upper Tyrrhenian Sea. *ICES CM* 2005/N:25.