

Sustainable and Precautionary Shark Management in ICCAT

17th Special Meeting of the Commission
November 2010, Paris, France

Sharks throughout the world's oceans are subjected to high catch levels in fisheries, either as targeted or incidental catch. Globally, scientists have noted that three-fourths of oceanic pelagic sharks and rays have an increased risk of extinction as a result of overfishing.¹ Sharks are caught in conjunction with many ICCAT fisheries, including by some longline fleets which target sharks to harvest their valuable fins.

Unfortunately, most Atlantic pelagic sharks have exceptionally limited biological productivity and can be overfished even at very low levels of fishing mortality. In fact, many of these species are at an elevated risk of over-exploitation, as shown in a 2008 ecological risk assessments carried out in conjunction with the ICCAT shark stock assessment.²

Various commitments and recommendations have been made regarding sustainable and precautionary shark fisheries management at international fora, including the 2009 Second Joint Meeting of Tuna RFMOs³, the 2009 Working Group on the Future of ICCAT⁴ and the 2010 ICCAT Standing Committee for Research and Statistics.⁵



¹ Dulvy, N. et al. You can swim but you can't hide: the global status and conservation of oceanic pelagic sharks and rays. May 22, 2008. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*. Vol. 18, Issue 5, pp. 459-482.

² SCRS/2008/017 – SHK Assessment

³ Report of the second joint meeting of tuna regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs). San Sebastian, Spain, June 29 – July 3, 2009.

⁴ Report of the Working Group on the Future of ICCAT. Sapporo, Japan – August 31 to September 3, 2009

⁵ Report of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS). Madrid, Spain, October 5-9, 2009

Oceana calls on ICCAT countries to fulfill the commitments to precautionary and responsible shark fisheries management by:

1) PROHIBITING RETENTION OF ENDANGERED OR PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE SHARK SPECIES.

ICCAT should prohibit the retention of any shark species that the IUCN lists as Endangered or Critically Endangered on a global level, and of any species particularly vulnerable to longline fishing or whose populations are especially depleted across large parts of the ICCAT region. Key species ICCAT countries should focus on in 2010 include hammerhead, oceanic whitetip and common thresher sharks.

2) INTRODUCING SCIENCE-BASED OR PRECAUTIONARY CATCH LIMITS FOR OTHER SHARK SPECIES CAUGHT IN ICCAT FISHERIES.

ICCAT countries should develop limits on catches, including bycatch, of the dozens of sharks species caught in ICCAT fisheries. Without such limits, these fisheries will remain unregulated and inconsistent with the UNCLOS provisions for the management of highly migratory species.⁶ This is especially vital for highly migratory sharks like blue sharks and shortfin mako sharks that are caught in targeted shark fisheries.

For species with too little data to develop science-based limits at this time, precautionary limits should be placed at the average of catches from 2007-2009. ICCAT countries must implement precautionary management until a full ecosystem-based fisheries approach can be implemented; this is essential to secure the recovery and long term sustainable use of highly migratory fish stocks.

3) IMPROVING THE ICCAT FINNING BAN BY REQUIRING THAT SHARKS BE LANDED WITH THEIR FINS ATTACHED.

Landing sharks with their fins naturally attached, is the most reliable means of enforcing a finning ban and facilitates improved data collection on shark landings. The current ICCAT finning prohibition is complicated, inadequate, and difficult to enforce. Requirements to land sharks with fins either wholly or partially attached in a natural manner are encouraged by the United Nations General Assembly, the IUCN, the Review Conference on the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement⁷ and many other international experts as the most straightforward method to ensure an end to shark finning.

⁶ The FAO definition for Unregulated fishing refers to fishing activities: (2) in areas or for fish stocks in relation to which there are no applicable conservation or management measures and where such fishing activities are conducted in a manner inconsistent with State responsibilities for the conservation of living marine resources under international law.

⁷ Report of the resumed Review Conference on the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. New York, 24-28 May 2010