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**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**

TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network

POSITION STATEMENT

SHARK CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT MEASURES

23rd meeting of the

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS

Cape Town, South Africa

November 18-25, 2013

Shark Advocates International, Defenders of Wildlife, Project AWARE, Shark Trust, World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace, Humane Society International, and TRAFFIC appreciate delegates' consideration of our views on key shark conservation issues currently being deliberated by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). Our organizations maintain a special focus on shark and ray conservation due in large part to the low reproductive capacity that leaves most of these species exceptionally vulnerable to overexploitation. We remain deeply concerned about the precarious status of these species caused by inadequate safeguards and poor compliance with existing rules. Our recommendations and concerns are detailed below.

SHARK FINNING

Our organizations applaud the United States (US), Brazil, Belize, and the European Union (EU) for their leadership in promoting the global prohibition of at-sea shark fin removal to strengthen enforcement of bans on shark finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea). We offer our strongest support for efforts to replace ICCAT's flawed fin-to-carcass ratio system with this best practice, and underscore the related assertion that the only way to guarantee that sharks are not finned is to require that the bodies be landed with the fins naturally attached. Specifically, we urge the Parties to adopt a prohibition on the removal of shark fins on board vessels, the retention on board, transshipment, and landing of shark fins which are not naturally attached to the shark carcass, before the first landing, *without exception*.

Shark Advocates International, a project of The Ocean Foundation, aims to safeguard sharks through sound conservation policy.

Supporting work in more than 35 countries, Humane Society International is one of the only international organizations working to protect all animals.

The Shark Trust is a UK charity working to advance the worldwide conservation of sharks through science, education, influence and action.

Greenpeace acts to change attitudes and behaviour, to protect and conserve the environment and to promote peace.

Project AWARE Foundation is a growing movement of scuba divers protecting the ocean planet – one dive at a time.

Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities.

TRAFFIC aims to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature.

WWF's mission is to conserve nature and reduce the most pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth.

Under a “fins-naturally-attached” policy:

- Enforcement burden is greatly reduced
- Information on species and quantities of sharks landed is vastly improved
- “High-grading” (mixing bodies and fins from different animals) is impossible.

The technique of making a partial cut (allowing fins to be folded against the body) can address industry concerns about safety and efficient storage. This practice is increasingly being applied to frozen as well as fresh sharks.

Because of the many practical advantages associated with the fins naturally attached method, the policy has been mandated by many Central and South America countries, the US, Chinese Taipei, the EU, and others; and is gaining acceptance in international arenas.

We urge ICCAT to continue to lead shark conservation efforts within the world’s tuna Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs) by being the first to adopt this best practice for preventing shark finning.

MAKO LIMITS

Our organizations strongly support the establishment of fishing limits on exceptionally valuable and vulnerable shortfin mako sharks (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), as a matter of priority. The Shark Working Group of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) has determined through ecological risk assessments that shortfin makos are among the shark species most vulnerable to overfishing in Atlantic longline fisheries. More specifically, shortfin makos were included in the shark species grouped in the high-risk area of the productivity-susceptibility plot in both 2008 and 2012 ICCAT analyses.

The SCRS has noted that high uncertainty in past catch estimates and deficiency of some important biological parameters are obstacles for obtaining reliable estimates of current status of shortfin mako stocks. As a result of the 2012 ICCAT shortfin mako population assessment, the SCRS recommended that fishing mortality on Atlantic shortfin mako sharks not increase on either the north or south stocks.

We stress that SCRS has also recommended precautionary, species-specific management measures for stocks associated with the greatest biological vulnerability, conservation concern, and lacking data. These characteristics clearly apply to shortfin mako sharks.

Both shortfin and longfin mako sharks (*Isurus paucus*) are listed under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Appendix II (migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation). The associated CMS action plan adopted last year includes a goal to ensure that directed and non-directed fisheries for CMS listed sharks are sustainable; activities described under this objective include cooperation through RFMOs.

These factors combined form a solid basis for the establishment of ICCAT limits to reduce or at least cap mako shark catches. We urge such action without further delay.

PORBEAGLE PROTECTION

Our organizations continue to strongly support EU efforts to protect the porbeagle shark (*Lamna nasus*), a globally threatened, low-productivity shark that has been seriously overfished in major parts of its range. Porbeagle sharks are exceptionally vulnerable to overfishing due to slow growth, late maturity (females mature at 13–18 years), lengthy gestation (8–9 months), few young (average of only four pups) and long life (up to ~65 years).

IUCN classifies the porbeagle shark as a threatened species with the following designations:

- *Vulnerable* globally
- *Critically Endangered* in the Northeast Atlantic Ocean & Mediterranean Sea
- *Endangered* in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean
- *Near Threatened* in the Southern Ocean.

Based on well documented depletion and biological vulnerability, the porbeagle shark is included in Appendix II of CMS, Annex II of the Barcelona Convention, and Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). These designations signal international recognition of the exceptional vulnerability and need for cooperative management of the species, but have not yet led to specific, binding fishery restrictions at ICCAT. In the meantime, national porbeagle conservation measures can be undermined by unregulated catches from adjacent countries' waters and the high seas.

For these reasons, we urge Parties to adopt a prohibition on retaining onboard, transshipping, landing, storing, selling, or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of a porbeagle shark, in line with past proposals from the EU. We strongly oppose any exceptions to these measures because of the associated risks to proper enforcement and overall effectiveness.

POPULATION ASSESSMENTS

In addition to these urgently needed fishery management measures, we urge ICCAT Parties to request that the SCRS commit to:

- reassessing in 2015 the population status of heavily exploited yet essentially unmanaged blue sharks (*Prionace glauca*), and
- developing management advice for common thresher sharks (*Alopias vulpinus*) which are taken regularly in Atlantic tuna fisheries under similarly inadequate controls.