

POSITION STATEMENT

General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean

41st Session, October 2017



The Shark Trust and Project AWARE are pleased to observe the deliberations of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). Our organizations – together with Shark Advocates International and Ecology Action Centre – are focused on the conservation of sharks and rays (elasmobranchs) because of their inherent vulnerability to overexploitation. Protection of Mediterranean elasmobranchs is a primary goal of our new *Shark League* coalition based on the species' exceptionally dire regional status. Particularly alarming is the 2016 regional Red List assessment by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) that found more than half of 72 Mediterranean shark and ray species threatened with extinction, and 13 species already locally extinct, primarily due to overfishing.

Our organizations urge GFCM Parties to stem declines and safeguard Mediterranean elasmobranchs by:

- **Strengthening the GFCM ban on finning (slicing off a shark's fin and discarding the body at sea) by requiring that all sharks are landed with their fins attached;**
- **Ensuring national, species-specific fishing and retention prohibitions are in place for all 24 elasmobranch species covered under the 2012 GFCM ban (GFCM/36/2012/3); and**
- **Documenting in detail domestic implementation of all Mediterranean elasmobranch conservation commitments.**

Preventing Shark Finning

We stress that this annual meeting offers an important opportunity for the GFCM to align its shark finning ban with the best practice

enforcement standards adopted in recent years by North Atlantic Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) through a prohibition on the removal of shark fins on-board vessels. Experts have demonstrated that under such a policy:

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

The technique of partially cutting and folding fins against the body can address industry concerns about safety and storage. Because of its many practical advantages, the fins-naturally-attached method is mandated in the European Union (EU), Central America, much of South America, the United States, and Canada (by March 2018). Now in place under the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), the policy is gaining acceptance within the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). Thanks to leadership from the EU, Egypt and many other Parties, the vast majority of the ICCAT membership now supports such a change.

We urge the GFCM to prohibit without exception removal of shark fins on-board vessels, as well as the retention, transshipment, and landing of fins that are not naturally attached to carcasses.



Protecting Threatened Species

We applaud the GFCM for taking groundbreaking action to protect the 24 shark and rays species listed on the Barcelona Convention's Annex II of the *Protocol concerning specially protected areas and biological diversity in the Mediterranean* through GFCM/36/2012/3. By banning retention and mandating careful release, this measure has great potential to protect many

especially valuable and vulnerable elasmobranchs, from economically important shortfin makos to Critically Endangered angel sharks.

We look forward to continuing discussions from recent GFCM meetings on Compliance and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in order to further encourage and understand implementation of this vital measure at the national level.

We remain concerned that associated details and regulations are lacking, and are eager to explore opportunities for ensuring urgently needed progress toward the important commitments made in 2012.

Our coalition is hopeful for effective collaboration in implementing these and other measures to safeguard the Mediterranean's exceptionally vulnerable sharks and rays.

Elasmobranch species listed on Barcelona Convention Annex II and covered by GFCM/36/2012/3, with their regional Red List status.

- Sand tiger shark *Carcharias taurus* Critically Endangered
- Great white shark *Carcharodon carcharias* Critically Endangered
- Basking shark *Cetorhinus maximus* Endangered
- Shortfin mako *Isurus oxyrinchus* Critically Endangered
- Tope *Galeorhinus galeus* Vulnerable
- Porbeagle *Lamna nasus* Critically Endangered
- Sandy skate *Leucoraja circularis* Critically Endangered
- Maltese skate *Leucoraja melitensis* Critically Endangered

- Spiny butterfly ray *Gymnura altavela* Critically Endangered
- Giant devil ray *Mobula mobular* Endangered
- Smalltooth sand tiger *Odontaspis ferox* Critically Endangered
- Angular rough shark *Oxynotus centrina* Critically Endangered
- Smalltooth sawfish *Pristis pectinata* Critically Endangered
- Largetooth sawfish *Pristis pristis* Critically Endangered
- Common skate *Dipturus batis* Critically Endangered
- Blackchin guitarfish *Rhinobatos cemiculus* Endangered
- Common guitarfish *Rhinobatos rhinobatos* Endangered
- White skate *Rostroraja alba* Endangered

- Smooth hammerhead *Sphyrna zygaena* Critically Endangered
- Scalloped hammerhead *Sphyrna lewini* Endangered
- Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* Endangered
- Smoothback Angel Shark *Squatina oculata* Critically Endangered
- Sawback Angel Shark *Squatina aculeata* Critically Endangered
- Angel Shark *Squatina squatina* Critically Endangered

Pursuant to GFCM/36/2012/3, these species "cannot be retained on board, transshipped, landed, transferred, stored, sold or displayed or offered for sale" and "must be released unharmed and alive to the extent possible," and ensured "a high protection from fishing activities."

Partners

Sustained engagement by experienced conservationists is vital for driving ambitious policies that ensure long-term sustainability of shared resources. The organizations that make up the Shark League have exceptional collective experience in science-based shark conservation and a history of successful collaboration.

Shark Advocates International (Washington, DC, USA) is a project of The Ocean Foundation based on 25 years of expertise in securing science-based shark and ray fishing limits, threatened species protections, and finning bans at local, national, and international levels.

Shark Trust (Devon, UK) is the United Kingdom's leading conservation organization dedicated to sharks and rays, with a 20-year record of effective independent and collaborative advocacy toward key UK and EU policy gains.

Project AWARE (California, USA) brings to the shark and ray policy debate the special, influential voice of its global constituency of 1.2 million scuba divers, along with an extensive network for communications and citizen action.

Ecology Action Centre (Nova Scotia, Canada) is a recognized leader in Canadian conservation policy, and the only Canadian conservation group consistently engaging on shark policy issues at national and international levels.

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