



MEDIA ADVISORY: SHARKS & ICCAT

#MakeTime4Makos

What: Annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) where representatives from Atlantic fishing nations will discuss proposals for measures to better prevent shark finning and to protect shortfin mako sharks from overfishing.

When and where: Tuesday 14th to 22nd November 2017 Marrakech, Morocco.

Why it's important: Sharks are among the most vulnerable animals taken in high seas fisheries targeting tuna and swordfish, and are yet seriously under-protected. There are no international limits on the most valuable high seas shark species (shortfin mako); the North Atlantic population has just been assessed as depleted. ICCAT's weak finning ban is out of line with best practice. Overfishing and waste of sharks has negative ecological and economic effects. ICCAT has the ability to set the standard for shark safeguards of 50 countries and the European Union. ICCAT action on makos and finning would set important precedent for other oceans.

Mako protection: Shortfin makos are exceptionally vulnerable to overfishing and yet no catch limits have been set by ICCAT or the countries with the highest catches (including Spain and Morocco). Scientists' previous advice to cap or reduce mako fishing mortality have been met with inadequate response.

Based on a new population assessment, ICCAT scientists report the following for the North Atlantic:

- Overfishing is occurring on an overfished population;
- Declines will continue under current catch levels;
- Catch must be cut to zero to rebuild stocks within the next two decades; and
- A complete ban on retention is the most effective, immediate conservation measure.

Stronger finning bans: ICCAT's ban on shark finning (the wasteful practice of slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea) is hard to enforce because a complicated, unreliable fin-to-body weight ratio is used to monitor compliance; this method also exacerbates inadequacies in shark catch information because of the difficulties identifying shark bodies (without fins) to species level. Replacing the fin-to-carcass ratio limit with a ban on removing shark fins at sea (in line with EU and US policy) would:

- Ease enforcement burden;
- Eliminate wiggle-room to fin sharks, and;
- Facilitate the collection of much-needed, species-specific catch data.

State of Play: The EU and Japan have tabled proposals for North shortfin mako sharks that allow 500t be landed, provided the sharks are already dead and the vessel has an observer to collect catch data. The EU proposal forces another assessment two to three years ahead of schedule. Japan's proposal lacks fallback action in case catch limits are exceeded. The EU suggests an overall catch limit while Japan proposes it be allocated among Parties. ICCAT scientists advise that a 500t mako catch limit has only a 35% chance of allowing

the population to rebuild by 2040. For South Atlantic makos, the EU has proposed a TAC of 2000t, in line with the scientific advice from a highly uncertain assessment. The Shark League is promoting a prohibition on mako retention for the North Atlantic (based on scientific advice) and the South Atlantic (based on the precautionary approach), as a first step to effective conservation of the species.

Twelve ICCAT Parties (and counting) have jointly proposed a ban on at-sea shark fin removal (requiring fins remain attached through landing). The 2016 “fins attached” proposal had 30 co-sponsors and support from ~80% of Parties in attendance, but was blocked by Japan, China, and Morocco.

Comment: Sonja Fordham, President of Shark Advocates International (a project of The Ocean Foundation) has participated in ICCAT meetings since 2004. She said the following about the upcoming shark debates:

“After many years of intense, unregulated fishing pressure, it’s now make or break time for mako sharks. ICCAT has long ignored warnings to limit catches of this slow-growing species. The alarm bells are now louder than ever, and the fate of the North Atlantic population hangs in the balance. We urge ICCAT Parties, especially EU and Morocco, to agree the decisive, immediate protections that are necessary to prevent the collapse of exceptionally valuable, vulnerable makos -- throughout the Atlantic.”

“At the same time, we expect to see new countries line up as proponents of a stronger ICCAT ban on the wasteful practice of shark finning. While more and more international bodies have adopted best practice bans on at-sea shark fin removal, ICCAT still has the chance to become the first regional tuna organization to do so. We’re hopeful that Canada and Mexico will join the long list of co-sponsors of the ‘fins-attached’ initiative, and will work to help convince Japan, China, and Morocco to stop blocking consensus on this historic step toward responsible shark fisheries management.”

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Notes to editors:

ICCAT manages Atlantic fisheries for tunas and tuna-like species that take sharks incidentally. Proposals for this year’s annual meeting are posted here: <http://www.iccat.int/com2017/>

[Open letter](#) to Karmenu Vella: Stop mako shark fishing before it’s too late!

Shark Advocates International, Shark Trust, Ecology Action Centre, and Project AWARE have formed the Shark League for the Atlantic and Mediterranean, a coalition dedicated to responsible, science-based regional shark conservation: www.sharkleague.org