

PRESS RELEASE



New Report Shows Most Countries are Falling Short on Commitments to Protect Sharks and Rays

Conservationists Highlight Shortcomings at Convention on Migratory Species Shark Meetings

Monaco, December 13, 2018. Most countries are not living up to shark and ray protection commitments made under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), according to conservationists. A comprehensive review released today by Shark Advocates International (SAI), *Sharks Ahead*, documents national and regional actions for 29 shark and ray species listed under CMS from 1999 to 2014. At a shark-focused CMS meeting this week, the authors highlight their findings and make urgent calls for action to:

- Prevent the collapse of mako shark populations
- Bring sawfishes back from the brink of extinction
- Limit fishing of endangered hammerheads
- Consider ecotourism as an alternative to fishing manta rays, and
- Bridge the divide between fisheries and environment authorities.

"We demonstrate that the listing of shark and ray species under CMS is outpacing implementation of vital commitments to protect these species – particularly from overfishing -- that come with listing," said report co-author, Julia Lawson, PhD student at the University of California Santa Barbara and an SAI fellow. "Only 28% are meeting all of their CMS obligations to strictly protect species in their waters."

Sharks and rays are inherently vulnerable and particularly threatened. Many species are fished across multiple jurisdictions, making international agreements key to population health. CMS is a global treaty aimed at conservation of wide-ranging animals. The 126 CMS Parties have committed to strictly protect Appendix I-listed species, and work internationally toward conservation of those listed on Appendix II.

"Inaction by member countries is squandering the potential of this international treaty to enhance shark and ray conservation globally, even as extinction looms for some species," said Sonja Fordham, report co-author and president of Shark Advocates International. "Fishing is the main threat to sharks and rays and must be much more directly addressed to secure a brighter future for these vulnerable, valuable species."

The following urgent problems persist for CMS-listed sharks and rays:

Atlantic makos are headed for collapse: The shortfin mako shark was listed under CMS Appendix II a decade ago. The North Atlantic population is now depleted and overfishing continues despite a 2017 measure by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) to immediately halt it. Roughly half of the ICCAT Parties are also Parties to CMS and yet none of them has led or even publicly called for heeding scientists' advice to ban retention of North Atlantic makos and/or cap South Atlantic catches. As CMS Parties and major mako fishing nations, the European Union and Brazil should lead efforts to establish concrete mako limits for the North and South Atlantic, respectively.

Sawfishes are at the brink of extinction: Sawfishes are the most endangered of all shark and ray species. Kenya proposed and secured CMS Appendix I listing for sawfishes in 2014, and yet has not fulfilled the associated obligation for strict national protection. Sawfish are at serious risk for extinction off East Africa. Assistance for establishing and implementing sawfish protections is urgently needed in Kenya as well as Mozambique and Madagascar.

Endangered hammerheads are still being fished. Scalloped and great hammerhead sharks are classified by IUCN as globally Endangered yet still fished in many regions including much of Latin America. Attempts by the United States and European Union to protect Appendix II-listed hammerheads through the regional fisheries body for the Eastern Tropical Pacific have to date been thwarted by Costa Rica, a CMS Party.

Manta ray ecotourism benefits are not fully appreciated. The Seychelles is positioning itself as a leader in the blue economy. Manta rays are among the species most popular with divers, and have great potential to support sustainable, non-extractive economic benefits. Seychelles, a CMS Party, has yet to protect this Appendix I-listed species. In fact, manta meat can still be found at Seychelles fish markets, more than seven years after listing.

Fisheries and environment authorities aren't communicating well. Within fisheries management realms, there is little recognition of shark and ray conservation commitments made through environmental treaties like CMS. South Africa has established a formal process for discussing and aligning such commitments across relevant government agencies providing a good example of bridging this gap.

Sharks Ahead covers CMS Parties' domestic conservation measures for the shark and ray species listed under CMS Appendix I prior to 2017: great white shark, all five sawfishes, both manta rays, all nine devil rays, and the basking shark. The authors also evaluated regional progress through fisheries bodies for the sharks and rays listed on Appendix II during this same time period: whale shark, porbeagle, northern hemisphere spiny dogfish, both makos, all three threshers, two hammerheads, and the silky shark.

The authors cite the lack of a compliance mechanism, confusion over CMS obligations, insufficient capacity within developing countries and the CMS Secretariat, and lack of focused critiques by conservation groups as key obstacles to fulfilling CMS commitments. Beyond strict protections for all Appendix I-listed sharks and rays, the authors recommend:

- Concrete fishing limits for Appendix II-listed species
- Improved data on shark and ray catches and trade
- Greater engagement and investment in CMS shark and ray focused initiatives
- Research, education, and enforcement programs to maximize effectiveness of measures, and
- Financial, technical, and legal assistance to help developing countries meet their commitments.

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Shark Advocates International is a non-profit project of The Ocean Foundation dedicated to securing science-based policies for sharks and rays. www.sharkadvocates.org

The full report (*Sharks Ahead: Realizing the Potential of the Convention on Migratory Species to Conserve Elasmobranchs*) is available here: <https://www.globalsharksraysinitiative.org/copy-of-our-partners>