



**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**



POSITION STATEMENT
SHARK CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT MEASURES
85th meeting of the
INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
Veracruz, Mexico June 10-14, 2013

Shark Advocates International, Humane Society International, Project AWARE, Shark Trust, and Defenders of Wildlife appreciate delegates' consideration of our views on key shark conservation issues currently being deliberated by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). 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 deteriorating status of these and related species caused by the lack of species-specific safeguards and poor compliance with existing IATTC rules. Our recommendations and concerns are detailed below.

EU & COSTA RICA PROPOSALS ON SHARK FINNING

Our organizations applaud the EU and Costa Rica for their leadership in promoting the global prohibition of at-sea shark fin removal as the best practice for enforcing bans on shark finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea). We wholeheartedly agree with the EU that the only way to guarantee that sharks are not finned is to require that the trunks be landed with the fins attached. In the case of the proposals before the IATTC regarding this policy, we strongly prefer and can only endorse the proposal from the EU because we believe its lack of exceptions for continuing the flawed fin-to-carcass ratio system is absolutely critical to meaningful change.

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.

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.

As detailed in a 2010 expert report from the IUCN Shark Specialist Group and the European Elasmobranch Association¹, under such a 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
- Value of the finished product can be increased.

The technique of making a partial cut (allowing fins to be folded against the body) can address industry concerns about safety and efficient storage. Costa Rican and other fishermen are using this practice effectively for 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 several Central and South America countries, the U.S., Chinese Taipei, and others; and is gaining acceptance in international arenas, as reflected in:

- The 2007 United Nations General Assembly Sustainable Fisheries Resolution
- The 2008 IUCN *Global Policy against Shark Finning*
- The 2010 Fish Stocks Agreement Review Conference on the Law of the Sea, and
- The final revised EU finning regulation agreed this week by the European Council.

We urge the IATTC to take the lead within the world’s tuna Regional Fishery Management Organizations by being the first to adopt this best practice for preventing shark finning.

EU PROPOSAL FOR HAMMERHEAD SHARK PROTECTION

Our organizations strongly support the EU proposal to protect hammerhead sharks. Specifically, we urge Parties to adopt a prohibition on retaining onboard, transshipping, landing, storing, selling, or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of hammerhead sharks of the family Sphyrnidae, taken in the IATTC Convention area, along with the proposed associated measures for safe release, reporting, and research.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has highlighted key species of hammerhead sharks as the most threatened semi-pelagic/pelagic sharks in the world. Scalloped hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrna lewini*) and great hammerheads (*Sphyrna mokarran*) are included on the IUCN Red List as Globally Endangered.

We continue to oppose any exceptions to proposed prohibitions because of the associated risks to proper enforcement and overall effectiveness. We stress that, as hammerhead sharks are largely coastal (rather than oceanic) species, complementary, national measures are essential to reversing population declines.

¹ Fowler, S. and Séret, B. 2010. *Shark fins in Europe: Implications for reforming the EU finning ban*. European Elasmobranch Association and IUCN Shark Specialist Group.

OTHER SHARK & RAY CONSERVATION ISSUES

Our organizations remain concerned about the lack of IATTC safeguards for **silky sharks** (*Carcharhinus falciformis*), and are deeply disappointed that no proposals have been offered for this annual meeting to specifically implement the recent scientific advice to limit fishing mortality on this dominant bycatch species. We urge development of such proposals and in the meantime, to reduce silky shark bycatch mortality, we join the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) in calling for improvements to data collection with respect to Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) and mandatory transition to non-entangling FADs.

We also join WWF and ISSF in urging the IATTC to follow staff advice and the examples set by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission by banning the deliberate setting of purse seines on **whale sharks** (*Rhincodon typus*) and developing measures to mitigate inadvertent encirclement.

We deeply appreciate the IATTC staff attention to the six species of **manta and devil rays** (*Manta* and *Mobula* spp.) taken in IATTC fisheries. These species share sharks' inherent susceptibility to overexploitation; their life history characteristics warrant a particularly cautious management approach. Manta and devil rays are increasingly in demand for their parts, particularly gill rakers and meat, and yet no population assessments and few national safeguards exist. Overfishing of manta rays, in particular, squanders the significant economic potential of eco-tourism for many tropical islands and coastal communities. We echo IATTC scientists' calls for improved species identification, further development of safe release techniques, and more focused research on these particularly vulnerable species.

Finally, we reiterate our strong support for the following IATTC staff recommendations:

- Mandatory reporting of fishing effort and shark catches by species (for all vessels);
- Research across gear types on shark catch mitigation and post-capture survival; and
- A fund to support related projects promoting shark data collection and research.