

Statement re: listing the Giant Manta Ray under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)

*Made by SAI's Sonja Fordham on behalf of several conservation & animal welfare organizations
At the CMS Conference of Parties, November 23, 2011
Bergen, Norway*

On behalf of Shark Advocates International, Humane Society International, Wildlife Conservation Society, International Fund for Animal Welfare, and the Norwegian Shark Alliance, we appreciate this opportunity to express our strong support for Ecuador's proposal to include in the CMS Appendices the giant manta ray: the largest living ray, and an exceptionally vulnerable, highly migratory, and increasingly threatened marine species.

The giant manta ray has exceptionally limited reproductive capacity, even when compared to other rays and sharks. Females are thought to mature at 8-10 years of age, produce just one pup after a year-long gestation period, rest for a year or two between pregnancies, and live at least 30 years.

The sparsely distributed and highly fragmented regional subpopulations of giant manta often consist of just a couple hundred individuals, which regularly migrate across national boundaries and have been tracked venturing onto the high seas.

The giant mantas' large size and tendency to move slowly in predictable aggregations make them easy targets to fishing, which is the greatest threat to their survival. In recent years, increased East Asian demand for manta ray gill rakers for use in Chinese medicine has been driving dramatic increases in directed, likely unsustainable manta fisheries. There are anecdotal reports that some local populations have already been severely depleted.

At the same time, manta ray eco-tourism is increasingly generating significant economic benefits for local communities across the globe, particularly in Mozambique, Maldives, and Hawaii. A new study estimates the value of manta-based tourism and filming at \$100 million/year globally.

Existing national protections by Range States are insufficient to effectively conserve this migratory species. Inclusion in the CMS Appendices can serve to dramatically improve awareness of the threats faced by manta rays and as a major step toward the effective conservation of these exceptionally vulnerable and valuable animals.

Based on these factors, our organizations respectfully urge adoption of Ecuador's proposal as well as complementary conservation and research initiatives for the giant manta ray.

Thank you.