



**HUMANE SOCIETY  
INTERNATIONAL**



## **POSITION STATEMENT SHARK CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT MEASURES**

*83<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the  
INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION  
La Jolla, California, June 25-29, 2012*

Shark Advocates International, Humane Society International, and Project AWARE Foundation 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 commend the European Union (EU) and Colombia for their efforts to secure IATTC conservation measures for hammerhead and silky sharks, respectively. We are 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 specific concerns and recommendations are detailed below.

### **SILKY SHARK CONSERVATION PROPOSAL**

**Request:** *Prohibit retention, landing, transshipment, and sale of silky sharks in all Eastern Pacific fisheries, at least until science-based limits derived from population assessments are available. Any exemptions to such prohibitions should be limited to developing countries and, at a minimum, carry obligations to report species-specific data on shark catches which should be promptly evaluated by IATTC scientists. In addition, close silky shark bycatch hotspots to pelagic fishing, mandate better reporting of relevant data, and facilitate mortality mitigation research.*

**Rationale:** Scientists have documented marked reduction since the mid 1990s in the relative abundance of silky sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*), a dominant species in the shark bycatch of IATTC tuna fisheries, particularly south of the equator. In 2011, scientists associated with the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) reported the silky shark as the pelagic shark most at risk for overexploitation from pelagic tuna fisheries in the Atlantic, based on Ecological Risk Assessment. We are disappointed that the IATTC assessment of the status of silky sharks has been delayed, but underscore the IATTC staff conclusion that there is sufficient information to warrant precautionary action.

*Supporting work in more than 35 countries, Humane Society International is one of the only international organizations working to protect all animals.  
Shark Advocates International, a project of The Ocean Foundation, aims to safeguard sharks through sound conservation policy.  
Project AWARE Foundation is a growing movement of scuba divers protecting the ocean planet – one dive at a time.*

To stem silky shark decline and promote recovery, we urge IATTC Parties to adopt a *clear prohibition* on the retention, transshipment, landing, and sale of silky sharks, in line with the 2011 IATTC measure on oceanic whitetip sharks and the *original* 2012 proposal from Colombia.

We oppose exceptions to such prohibitions because of the associated risks to proper enforcement and overall effectiveness. If exemptions are deemed absolutely necessary to advance silky shark conservation this year, we strongly urge that they be limited to developing countries and predicated on prompt reporting of species-specific shark catch data as well as concrete plans for improving data collection and reducing silky shark catches and landings, similar to measures adopted in 2011 by ICCAT. Instructions for IATTC scientists to evaluate and make recommendations on such submissions should be incorporated into the text on exceptions.

We also urge consideration of closures for areas of high bycatch of juvenile silky sharks (previously suggested by IATTC scientists) as a back-up conservation measure.

In addition, we strongly support the IATTC staff recommendations for:

- 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.

## **HAMMERHEAD SHARK PROTECTION PROPOSAL**

**Request:** *Prohibit retention, landing, transshipment, and sale of hammerhead sharks in all Eastern Pacific fisheries. Any exemptions to such prohibitions should, at a minimum, carry obligations to report species-specific data on shark catches which should be promptly evaluated by IATTC scientists. Mandate better reporting of relevant data and facilitate mortality mitigation research.*

**Rationale:** 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.

Because of the particularly dire status of these species, we continue to support the *original* proposal for hammerhead sharks from the EU: a prohibition on the retention, transshipment, landing, storing, selling, and offering for sale any part or whole carcass of hammerhead sharks of Family Sphyrnidae. We oppose exceptions to such prohibitions because of the associated risks to proper enforcement and overall effectiveness. If exemptions are deemed absolutely necessary to advance hammerhead shark conservation this year, we strongly urge that they be limited to developing countries and predicated on prompt reporting of species-specific shark catch data as well as plans for improving data collection and reducing hammerhead catches and landings, similar to measures adopted by ICCAT in 2011 for *silky* sharks. Instructions for IATTC scientists to evaluate such submissions should be incorporated into the text on exceptions.

We stress that, as hammerhead sharks are largely coastal (rather than oceanic) species, complementary, national measures are essential to reversing population declines.

We note that the IATTC staff recommendations for improving shark catch and effort data and facilitating relevant shark fishery research (see above) would also benefit hammerheads.

## SHARK FINNING

Given that reported violations to the IATTC shark finning ban (estimated at 461 for 2010) have been discussed by the *Committee for the Review of Implementation of Measures Adopted by the Commission*, we take this opportunity to reiterate our strong support for the “fins naturally attached” method as the most reliable means for enforcing a shark finning ban. As detailed in a 2010 expert report from the IUCN Shark Specialist Group and the European Elasmobranch Association<sup>1</sup>, 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
- A pending European Commission proposal to Member States and Parliament

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.

## MANTA & DEVIL RAYS

As you may be aware, manta and devil rays (*Manta* and *Mobula* spp.) share sharks’ inherent susceptibility to overexploitation; their life history characteristics warrant a particularly cautious management approach. The estimate for total average annual bycatch of “manta rays” from 1993 to 2009 in IATTC purse seine fisheries is on par with that of oceanic whitetip sharks (3500+ animals). 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. We echo IATTC scientists’ calls for improved species identification and focused research on these particularly vulnerable species.

Overfishing of manta rays, in particular, squanders the significant economic potential of eco-tourism. Operations that facilitate diving and swimming with mantas are increasingly profitable and bring significant economic benefits to tropical islands and coastal communities across the globe. A recent study estimates the worldwide value of manta-based tourism and filming at US\$100 million per year.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> S. Heinrichs, M. O'Malley, H. Medd, and P. Hilton. 2011. *Manta Ray of Hope: Global State of Manta and Mobula Rays*. Manta Ray of Hope Project ([www.mantarayofhope.com](http://www.mantarayofhope.com)).