

17 September 2012

Maria Damanaki
European Commissioner
Maritime Affairs & Fisheries
European Commission
B - 1049 Brussels



Dear Ms. Damanaki:

On behalf of our organizations, we are writing to encourage European Union (EU) support for science-based limits on threatened thorny skates at this week's annual meeting of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO). Specifically, we urge the European Commission to work to secure a reduction in the NAFO thorny skate (Division 3LNO) total allowable catch (TAC) from 8,500 metric tons (t) to no more than the level suggested by the NAFO Scientific Council (4,700t).

We are seriously concerned about the status and management of thorny skate (*Amblyraja radiata*), classified by the IUCN as *Vulnerable* globally and *Critically Endangered* off the U.S. east coast. Whereas setting the world's first Regional Fishery Management Organization TAC for a shark or ray was a major accomplishment for NAFO, we maintain that this limit must be in line with scientific advice in order for it to be effective in rebuilding the population.

The NAFO Scientific Council has demonstrated that:

- thorny skates have low resilience to fishing pressure due to low population growth rates
- the Division 3LNO population remains low despite years of reduced fishing mortality, and
- to promote recovery, 2013 skate catches should not exceed 4,700t in Division 3LNO.

As you may recall, NAFO Parties failed to heed similar skate advice at the 2011 annual meeting and instead pledged to adopt the Scientific Council recommendations in 2012.

Given that Spain is the main player in the NAFO thorny skate fishery, the EU has a key role in negotiation of the TAC as well as an important responsibility to work to ensure sustainable fisheries for this vulnerable species. Moreover, adherence to scientific advice is integral to the European *Community Plan of Action for Sharks*.

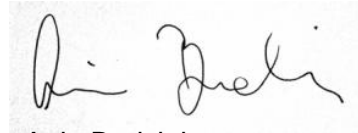
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Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing about the meeting outcomes.

Sincerely,



Sonja Fordham
President
Shark Advocates International



Ania Budziak
Associate Director, Science & Policy
Project AWARE Foundation



Sandrine Polti
Shark Policy Advisor
Shark Alliance



Ali Hood
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Massimiliano Bottaro
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