



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Mixed Results for Sharks at Atlantic Tuna Commission Meeting *ICCAT protects silky sharks, leaves porbeagles vulnerable and finning ban weak*

Istanbul. November 19, 2011. Fishing nations at the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) have acted on one of three shark conservation proposals. ICCAT Parties adopted protections for silky sharks, based on a proposal from the EU, Brazil, and the US. Proposals to protect porbeagle sharks and to strengthen the ICCAT ban on shark finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea) were defeated.

"We are pleased that ICCAT has taken steps to protect silky sharks, but much more must be done to effectively safeguard this and other exceptionally vulnerable shark species," said Sonja Fordham, President of Shark Advocates International.

The silky shark is a coastal and oceanic tropical species taken in fisheries around the world. Scientists have warned that this species is highly vulnerable to ICCAT fisheries. The new measure bans retention, transshipment, and landing; it exempts developing countries, provided that catches are reported, do not increase, and do not enter international trade. Countries that require landing of dead fish can also opt out.

For the second time, an EU proposal to protect porbeagle sharks failed due to opposition from Canada, the only Party with a targeted fishery for the species.

Belize, Brazil, and the US were unsuccessful in their third attempt to strengthen the ICCAT finning ban by replacing the current fin to carcass weight ratio limit with a prohibition on removing fins at sea. China, Japan, and South Africa spoke in opposition to the measure.

Shark fins are used in a traditional, celebratory Chinese soup. High demand for fins drives many shark fisheries and provides incentive for finning. Many shark species, particularly porbeagles and shortfin makos, are also sought for their meat. ICCAT has called for reductions in mako fishing, but has yet to limit mako catches. ICCAT adopted protections for bigeye thresher sharks in 2009 and protections for oceanic whitetip and hammerhead sharks in 2010.

"We urge ICCAT Parties to promptly implement the silky shark measure as well as previously agreed ICCAT safeguards for sharks, and to propose protections for mako sharks and other vulnerable species at next year's ICCAT meeting," added Fordham.

Notes to Editors:

Shark Advocates International (SAI) is a project of The Ocean Foundation established to advance sound policies for sharks and rays. Based on nearly 20 years of shark conservation achievement, SAI uses its expertise to secure science-based limits on shark fishing and trade, protection for endangered species, and stronger bans on finning. SAI President, Sonja Fordham, serves on the US ICCAT Advisory Committee and has participated in ICCAT meetings since 2004.

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) is responsible for the conservation of tunas and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. The Convention entered into force in 1969. ICCAT currently reports 48 Contracting Parties, including the European Union.

Only seven countries have reported any silky shark landings to ICCAT: Brazil, Taiwan, Ivory Coast, Spain, Portugal, Mexico, and the US. The US is the only ICCAT Party with domestic catch limits specific to silky sharks.

The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) classifies silky sharks as Near Threatened and porbeagle sharks as Vulnerable on a global scale; porbeagle sharks are categorized as Endangered in the Northwest Atlantic and Critically Endangered in the Northeast Atlantic. Species included in the Vulnerable, Endangered, and Critically Endangered IUCN categories are considered by IUCN to be Threatened. More information at: <http://www.iucn.org/?3362/Third-of-open-ocean-sharks-threatened-with-extinction>. IUCN classifies one-third of oceanic sharks and rays as Threatened.