



POSITION STATEMENT
SHARK & RAY CONSERVATION MEASURES
90th meeting of the
INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
La Jolla, California; June 27 - July 1, 2016

Our organizations appreciate the opportunity to participate in meetings of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and to offer our perspective on the conservation of sharks and rays. We focus on these species because of the low reproductive capacity that leaves most of them particularly vulnerable to overexploitation. We remain deeply concerned about the deteriorating status of Eastern Pacific shark and ray populations, and the associated lack of basic safeguards. Our recommendations for measures that could begin to address these concerns are detailed below.

SHARK FINNING

We applaud the European Union (EU), Costa Rica, Belize, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Panama for leadership in promoting the prohibition of at-sea shark fin removal as the best practice for enforcing the IATTC ban on shark finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea).

In 2010, the IUCN Shark Specialist Group and the European Elasmobranch Association¹ found that under such a policy:

- Enforcement burden is greatly reduced;
- Information on species and quantities of sharks landed is vastly improved; and
- "High-grading" (mixing bodies and fins from different animals) is impossible.

The technique of partially cutting and folding fins against the body can address industry concerns about safety and storage. EU and Costa Rican fishermen are using this method for frozen as well as fresh sharks. Because of its many practical advantages, the fins-naturally-attached method has been mandated not only in the EU and Central America, but also in the United States (US), much of South America, and elsewhere. It is also gaining acceptance in international arenas, as demonstrated most recently by support from 30 Parties to the International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, including Belize, El Salvador, EU, Guatemala, Panama, US, and Venezuela at the 2015 annual meeting.

We urge the IATTC to prohibit removal of shark fins on-board vessels, as well as the retention, transshipment, and landing of shark fins that are not naturally attached to carcasses, *without exception*. We favor the EU proposal for such action because of its comprehensive text and intention for immediate implementation.

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.

Shark Advocates International, a project of The Ocean Foundation, works to safeguard sharks & rays through sound, science-based 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.

ADDITIONAL OVERARCHING MEASURES

High mortality of discarded sharks damages both population health and hope for sustainable fisheries. Sustainability also relies on vastly improved shark catch data that underpin sound limits on exploitation. In the meantime, targeted shark fishing, particularly for depleted populations, should be absolutely minimized. We therefore urge the IATTC to mandate and ensure the following, as proposed by the EU, US and/or Mexico:

- Prompt, careful release of all unwanted sharks and rays taken in purse seines, according to procedures outlined by the IATTC Scientific Staff (no gaffing, towing, or lifting by holes, gills, spiracles, etc.);
- Collection and submission of catch data in accordance with IATTC data reporting requirements;
- Expanded observer coverage (for purse-seine vessels under 364 metric tons capacity as well as at least 20% for longliners greater than 20 meters in overall length);
- Evaluation of electronic monitoring systems observer programs;
- An immediate workplan for comprehensive assessment of silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) and hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini* and *Sphyrna zygaena*) populations;
- Bans on the use of “shark lines” for longline vessels targeting tuna or swordfish; and
- Further research toward minimizing shark and ray bycatch and related mortality.

SILKY SHARKS

Dramatic declines have sparked global concern for silky sharks. Listing under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is currently being proposed by 22 CITES Parties, including the EU and Panama. The 2014 addition of the silky shark to Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) carries regional conservation obligations for CMS Parties. IATTC scientists have stressed that precautionary measures are critical and urgent for population rebuilding in the Eastern Pacific. Accordingly, as interim steps while data and advice are improved, we urge adoption of species-specific measures proposed by the EU to require that IATTC Members and Cooperating non-Members (CPCs), in line with IATTC scientific advice:

- Prohibit retention and ensure prompt safe release of incidentally caught silky sharks, allowing exceptions for only unintentional purse seine catch if surrendered to authorities at landing (not sold or bartered);
- Declare and manage targeted silky shark fisheries by 2018, based on advice and approval of IATTC scientists;
- Limit retention of juveniles under 100 cm to 20% of total silky shark catches per trip; and
- Close targeted silky shark fisheries for three consecutive months of each calendar year.

HAMMERHEAD SHARKS

The IUCN has highlighted key species of hammerhead sharks as the most threatened semi-pelagic/pelagic sharks in the world. Given this dire status, our organizations continue to support a full IATTC prohibition on hammerhead shark retention, or at least basic limits to guard against further depletion while regional population assessments are developed. We stress that CMS Parties have committed to collaborate on regional hammerhead conservation programs while CITES Parties are obligated to restrict international hammerhead trade to that which can be demonstrated to be sourced from sustainable fishing operations.

MOBULID RAYS

While we are pleased that the IATTC has taken groundbreaking action to safeguard manta and devil rays (family Mobulidae), we remain concerned that the 2015 prohibition on retention, etc. allows exceptions for small-scale fisheries that may well do substantial damage to these exceptionally vulnerable populations. We note that CMS Appendix I listings require CMS Parties to strictly protect mobulids. We urge IATTC CPCs to unilaterally prohibit take and mandate careful release of all mobulid rays while working to remove exceptions in the broader IATTC prohibition.