

For Immediate Release
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**Canada isolated at international meeting:
Only country defending right to fish endangered porbeagle shark**

Halifax, NS - In just three days, 14 000 people have sent letters to Gail Shea, Canada's Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, expressing their outrage that Canada continues to block an international proposal to stop fishing the endangered porbeagle shark.

For the last two years, Canada has been the only country of 48 member countries to block the adoption of a ban on fishing for the endangered shark at the meeting of the International Committee on the Conservation of the Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and plans at this year's meeting, opening November 12th, to once again defend its right to continue fishing for porbeagles even while the 47 other members disagree.

"We have been overwhelmed by the number of people sending letters. This has really touched a nerve," said Shannon Arnold, Marine Program Coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre in Halifax. "People are embarrassed that Canada is once again being uncooperative on the international stage and outraged that this government seems to constantly be pursuing profits without concern for maintaining the health of our resources those profits depend on."

Canada has found its self isolated on this issue at ICCAT where in past decades it was seen as a leader. It is now the only country there to maintain a target fishery for porbeagles and allows thousands more to be caught by fisheries as they target other fish, like swordfish- substantially more than any other country in the Atlantic.

The porbeagle shark's precipitous decline to only 20% of its 1961 population in our waters has led to the endangered designation. The European Union has now banned fishing in its waters, there is a ban in the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic-wide ban, proposed by the EU, would give the slow-to-reproduce shark the best chance to recover and help close loopholes of any illegal fishing for it in international waters.

Canada has led the world on porbeagle research and the government's own predictions show that even without fishing this shark will take decades to recover. With the amount of fishing Canada allows the recovery time is pushed to over 100 years.

"We, along with many countries, don't believe that a century to rebuild a population can actually be considered a recovery strategy. This is an unacceptable amount of risk to take with one of the most endangered animals in Canada", argues Arnold. "In fact, this shark is often called Canada's shark because as a cold-loving animal spends much of its life in our cold waters and the decision that lies with the Canadian minister will have a major impact on this species surviving in the Atlantic."

The Ecology Action Centre (EAC) is the only Canadian civil society group granted official status to participate at the closed door negotiations that are taking place in Morocco this year from November 12-19th. The EAC attends to ensure the government's management of public resources is

accountable to all its citizens and to urge their compliance with international conservation measures that will only work through multi-country cooperation.

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Petition letters to Fisheries Minister at

<http://www.change.org/en-CA/petitions/canada-protect-porbeagle-sharks-from-politics>

Ecology Action Centre detailed letter to Fisheries Minister:

http://www.friendsofhector.org/images/uploads/EAC_Letter_on_Porbeagle_to_Minister_Oct_29_2012.pdf

Science references, further briefings and information can be found at

<http://www.friendsofhector.org/media>

Key facts

- **Porbeagle sharks are assessed as endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) that advises the Species at Risk Act and the International Union on the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). There is only 12-15% of the breeding stock left.**
- **ICCAT scientists consider porbeagles one of the most vulnerable sharks. They live for over 30 years and don't start to reproduce until 14 years of age and only have a few live pups a year and are, therefore, extremely susceptible to overfishing. They were fished to near extinction in a matter of 6-7 years in the 1960s and 70s and then hit hard again in the 1990s.**
- **There are only 3 active license holders in the directed porbeagle shark fishery. Most of the catch is landed by fisheries fishing for other fish, such as longline swordfish and bottom trawl for groundfish to sell for meat and fins. There are no fishers dependent on the porbeagle for their income.**
- **The EAC is the only Canadian NGO to attend ICCAT as international observers. The EAC sits on the Atlantic regional advisory council for the swordfish, tuna, and shark fisheries. The Fisheries Minister has yet to publicly comment on official letters sent.**
- **ICCAT was formed in 1969 to jointly manage species, like swordfish and tuna that migrate around the entire Atlantic and Mediterranean. It has 48 member countries.**

The Ecology Action Centre (EAC) is Atlantic Canada's oldest and largest environmental organization, celebrating 40 years of action in 2011. The Marine Issues Committee of the Ecology Action Centre works locally, nationally and internationally towards conserving and protecting marine ecosystems and maintaining sustainable fisheries and vibrant coastal communities.