



**For Immediate Release
November 19th, 2012**

Canada's request for exemption at international meeting derails protection for endangered shark

Agadir, Morocco – Efforts to protect the endangered porbeagle shark, often called Canada's shark, have failed for the third year running at the annual fisheries management meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). At the close of this year's meeting in Morocco, Canada again found itself isolated among 48 member countries by refusing to end fishing for porbeagles and asking to be exempted from a measure proposed by the European Union to protect porbeagles across the Atlantic

“Canada's continued insistence on special treatment has led to a break down of the process that such delicate international forums depend on. Canada's refusal to stop fishing for this endangered shark has opened the door to other countries who may want to fish for this shark to raise their hand looking for exemptions as well,” says Shannon Arnold, Marine Program Coordinator of Halifax's Ecology Action Centre (EAC), who is attending the meeting as the only Canadian civil society group granted official observer status.

Not only is Canada facing pressure from other countries on this issue, but over 20 000 Canadians have sent letters over the last week to Gail Shea, the Fisheries Minister, expressing outrage at their government's stance on the international stage.

“Frankly, we have been overwhelmed by the response and that it has touched such a nerve,” said Arnold, “Canadians are embarrassed that their government is once more standing in the way of international conservation measures and cooperation. Unfortunately, their concern has fallen on deaf ears again. We hope the Minister will now take some decisive actions domestically to end fishing for this very depleted shark.”

The porbeagle shark is often called, Canada's shark, since the population in the West Atlantic spends much of its life in our waters. The shark's precipitous decline to only 20% of its 1961 population in our waters has led to the endangered designation.

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.

“Many would agree that up to century time line cannot be considered a proper recovery plan for an animal that is endangered. We are disappointed the strategy with the lowest risk and highest chance of success could not be agreed upon here at ICCAT,” says Arnold “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 have give the slow-to-reproduce shark the best chance to recover and help close loopholes allowing porbeagle fishing in international waters.”

Contact:

Shannon Arnold

Marine Program Coordinator, Ecology Action Centre, Halifax, Canada

sharnold@ecologyaction.ca

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](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.