



**For Immediate Release
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Sharks winners at ICCAT, groups urge Canada to bring this home

Paris, FR – As the first Canadian conservation organization to attend an annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), which ended yesterday in Paris, the Halifax based Ecology Action Centre (EAC), found that Canada was willing to support conservation measures, as long as they had little impact on Canadian fisheries. Canada co-sponsored measures to protect sea turtles and supported increased protection for some sharks, but stood in the way of Atlantic wide protection for the endangered porbeagle shark.

“We are pleased that Canada took steps towards protecting sea turtles and sharks on the international stage at ICCAT. It is encouraging to see them showing conservation leadership, but at the end of the day, Canada doesn’t seem willing to make the hard decisions necessary to balance our impacts on the oceans,” says Shannon Arnold, marine coordinator of the Ecology Action Centre. “The positions they supported will not change the numbers of sharks caught in our fisheries. This outcome still leaves us with no limits or protection for the vast majority of the 100 000 sharks caught in Atlantic Canada.”

ICCAT adopted a ban on fishing oceanic white-tip shark and hammerhead sharks (neither are caught in Atlantic Canadian fisheries) and required full reporting of short-fin mako sharks on threat of countries losing their right to keep this shark if they do not comply. The parties also took the first steps towards protecting sea turtles in the Atlantic and ensuring their live release when caught. A proposal requiring shark fins be attached to carcasses at landing was not passed.

Canada’s position killed the proposal to ban fishing for porbeagle shark, endangered in the North West Atlantic. This drew fire from the EU, who has already stopped their porbeagle fisheries, as well from international conservation groups. While Canada was willing to reduce its catch of this shark, it would not commit to ending its fishery. Canada remains the only ICCAT country with a directed fishery for this shark whose low population numbers are not expected to recover for upwards of a century.

While all eyes were on negotiations of bluefin tuna quota, which remained status quo, this year, a record number of shark conservation proposals revealed the beginning of a shift in the way ICCAT manages the oceans resources they are responsible for.

“At this meeting, ICCAT parties started to get the message that their obligations go beyond haggling over their pieces of the lucrative seafood pie and extend to protecting animals, like sharks and sea turtles that are also caught in fisheries for swordfish and tunas,” says Shannon Arnold, marine coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre. “Now

momentum needs to continue to ensure all countries, Canada included, start to regulate these changes in their own fisheries, otherwise there will only be progress on paper and there will be no difference on the water.”

The Ecology Action Centre is hopefully that the progress shown by Canada and ICCAT as a whole on reducing sharks and sea turtles catches is only the beginning. “We must start being proactive on sustainable ocean use,” asserts Arnold. “Waiting until a species is endangered to put in place management measures is not the way we should be treating our marine ecosystem

For more information contact:

Shannon Arnold, Marine Coordinator, Ecology Action Centre

Email: sharnold@ecologyaction.ca

Cell: 1 902 489 2384

Background:

Shark and sea turtle bycatch facts:

The number of sharks caught in ICCAT fisheries every year number in the millions all without the normal management measures, like catch limits, imposed for other fished species. In Atlantic Canada, at least 100, 000 sharks are caught. Ninety percent of these are blue shark, listed as near threatened by the International Union on the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Endangered porbeagle shark and short-fin mako, status vulnerable, make up the rest. 1200 loggerhead sea turtles, recently listed as endangered in Canada and 120 critically endangered leatherback sea turtles are also caught accidentally in these fisheries.