

October 29, 2012

The Honourable Gail Shea,
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
Parliament Buildings, Wellington St.
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Shea,

We are writing today to urge you to support a proposed ban on retaining porbeagle sharks at the upcoming 18th Special Meeting of the International Committee for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) being held in Morocco from the 12th to the 19th of November. Canada is now the only country out of 48 Member States to maintain a directed fishery for the porbeagle shark, which has been assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) as 'Endangered'. For the last two years, Canada's opposition at ICCAT has blocked consensus on Atlantic-wide protection for this shark. This November, we are asking you to reconsider our government's position again and take the opportunity to give this shark the best chance of recovery.

The Ecology Action Centre, based in Halifax, Nova Scotia has been working for 41 years to create environmentally and economically sustainable solutions for the future. Our work on sustainable fisheries policy has focused on offering solutions to the bycatch of sharks and sea turtles in the Atlantic swordfish longline fleet. We are members of the Atlantic Large Pelagics Advisory Council (ALPAC) where we have tabled a comprehensive, science based plan for reducing bycatch and implementing the ecosystem based approach to the pelagic longline fisheries. We have official observer status at ICCAT and are the only Canadian civil society organization represented at this international fisheries negotiation.

The porbeagle shark is often referred to as 'Canada's shark' because it spends much of its lifecycle in our cool waters, therefore Canada's decision to allow fishing for this shark has a significant impact on its recovery in the North West Atlantic population. DFO Maritimes region science has led the world in research on the porbeagle – documenting **an 89% decline in population since 1961.**

DFO's assessment shows that without fishing, this shark will need decades to recover, and continuing to allow fishing, even at a low level, pushes that recovery time to more than 100 years - assuming that nothing changes in the environment or fishing technology.

The current total allowable catch (TAC) in Canada is set at 185 tonnes, but this cannot be considered a managed cap as there is no mechanism in place to stop fishing once the limit is reached. In 2006, this TAC was overfished with no consequence. Landings in recent years have been low as the market for endangered shark meat has declined, however should market demand increase again there must be a regulatory mechanism in place. The current TAC does not take into consideration the estimated 50% post release mortality of porbeagles that are not landed. The mortality of these sharks could actually be considerably higher than what is being landed.

The directed porbeagle fishery is classified as an exploratory fishery still and this season only 3 fishers renew their licences. There are no fishermen dependent on this fishery for their livelihood. The majority of landings are from the bycatch fishery where porbeagle is not the main economic driver.

The European Union is asking Canada to support their proposal to end retention of this shark in the ICCAT convention area to reduce any incentive to target the porbeagle and allow for the greatest probability of recovery possible.

The 2008 joint ICCAT-ICES assessment for the North East Atlantic population of porbeagle gave the following advice: “*Given the state of the stock, no targeted fishing for porbeagle should be permitted and bycatch should be limited and landings of porbeagle should not be allowed.*”¹ However, much like the advice for the Canadian North West Atlantic stock, the management advice also gave the EU an option, stating that a catch 200-400 tonnes could allow recovery taking upwards of 60-100 years.

Despite the fact that there were still significant fisheries in France and Spain and political pressure not to act, the EU made the decision in line with the precautionary principle to implementing a zero TAC in 2010 and finalizing a total fishing ban in 2011. Canada was the only country not to agree with the consensus at ICCAT that this protection needs to be extended across the high seas and throughout the Atlantic. Canada’s reluctance to agree to strong conservation measures for one of the most vulnerable sharks in the ocean is highly obstructionist for no discernible economic purpose. Economic cost-benefit analysis should take into account the costs and benefits to all stakeholders, including Canadian society as a whole, and not just, in this case, marginal losses to the industry.

The decision that Canada makes this November will have a significant impact on the recovery of one of the most endangered species in Canadian territory. This November, you will have the chance to take a major step to enhance Canada’s international reputation for wildlife protection and implement a policy in line with Canada’s commitment to the precautionary approach to fisheries management. We hope that you agree this choice should be an easy one.

Minister Shea, we urge you to take decisive action and end the two year stalemate – agree to protection for the porbeagle shark, Canada’s shark.

Sincerely,



Shannon Arnold Marine
Conservation Program Coordinator
Ecology Action Centre

CC: Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Keith Ashfield
Deputy Minister Claire Dansereau
Regional Director General, Maritimes Region, Faith Scattolon