



**For Immediate Release  
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## **Poor Canadian Management of Sharks, Tuna and Swordfish Leads Environmental Group to ICCAT**

Halifax, NS – Every year in Canada’s Atlantic waters, at least 100 000 sharks are caught incidentally in the surface longline fishery for swordfish and tuna, along with about 1200 sea turtles, juvenile fish as well as other marine animals. More than 50% of the total catch is thrown back, and 90% by weight of the species discarded are listed as threatened or endangered in Canada. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has no rules in place to limit this destructive practice or to promote the use of available less harmful gear.

Frustrated with the lack of progress in reforming this fishery through internal national government processes, the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) is heading to this year’s meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) meeting in Paris as the first Canadian NGO to attend as official observers. Canada receives allocations of highly migratory species (including swordfish and tuna) from ICCAT. While ICCAT members are notorious for failing to rebuild tuna populations and curb overfishing, many ICCAT member States have implemented stronger conservation measures for sharks and sea turtles than Canada.

“Despite obligations under ICCAT to report on sharks caught in its fisheries, Canada does not monitor the surface longline fishery well enough to report the proper information on which species are being caught, how many are caught and how many die,” says Shannon Arnold, EAC Marine Coordinator. “Canada tends to tout its good practices at these meetings, but the reality is that other countries fishing in the Atlantic have leapfrogged ahead of Canada with better management.”

Sharks play an extremely important role in our oceans as apex predators, keeping marine ecosystems in balance. Globally, shark populations have declined by 90 percent due to overfishing and scientists are only now starting to understand the effects this is having on marine food webs and commercial fisheries.

“ICCAT’s own stock assessments show that Atlantic sharks are more vulnerable to overfishing than other shark species and have an increased risk of extinction. Recommendations call for states to reduce the number of sharks killed in their fisheries. We’ve been waiting for Canada to do its part,” says Susanna Fuller, Marine Biologist with the EAC.

Nineteen species of shark are known to exist in Atlantic Canada, with many caught in our fisheries, yet only the porbeagle shark, considered endangered in the North Atlantic, has a management plan with catch limits in place. This species is also the subject of a directed fishery in Canada, which other countries are calling for an end to.

“Our goal at ICCAT is to remind Canada that it is their duty to manage and conserve fisheries resources in the public interest. Canadians care about the health of their oceans, and this often gets forgotten in the face of fishing industry lobbying. We are working with other conservation organizations attending the meeting, to provide a balance to the pressure that the large-scale fishing industry wields at these meetings,” says Arnold.

While other countries including the United States and the European Union allow conservation organizations on their official delegations, Canada only includes government staff and fishing industry representatives.

This year, conservation groups will be calling on ICCAT members to adopt strong shark conservation measures to be tabled at the meeting this year, including the adoption of catch limits for short-fin mako, expansion of the no retention rule on big-eye thresher shark, strengthening the protection of porbeagle and oceanic white-tip sharks, as well as implementing a “fins-attached” rule when sharks are landed in port. The EAC is urging Canada to support these measures, to fully comply with reporting regulations already in place, and to show leadership when it comes for setting high standards that protect our oceans for generations to come.

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*The annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), will be held from November 17-27, 2010 in Paris, France.*

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**Background Information**

- Under ICCAT, Canada is allocated quota for North Atlantic swordfish, bigeye tuna, yellow fin tuna, albacore tuna, and bluefin tuna
- The UN has passed 8 resolutions calling for Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, such as ICCAT, to improve the management of shark fisheries.
- Joint RFMO meetings have established recommendations and course of actions of sharks calling for:
  - *Measures to improve the enforcement of existing finning bans;*
  - *Prohibitions on retention of particularly vulnerable or depleted shark species, based on advice from scientists and experts;*

- *Concrete management measures in line with best available scientific advice with priority given to overfished populations;*
- *Precautionary fishing controls on a provisional basis for shark species for which there is no scientific advice; and*
- *Measures to improve the provision of data on sharks in all fisheries and by all gears.*

**Species discarded annually in the Canadian Atlantic Surface Longline fishery**

<b>Species name and number discarded</b>	<b>IUCN Listing</b>	<b>COSEWIC Listing</b>
~170 Leatherback Sea Turtle	Critically Endangered	Endangered
~1200 Loggerhead Sea Turtle	Endangered	Under Review
~ 100 000 Sharks: Porbeagle Shortfin Mako Blue Shark	Vulnerable Vulnerable Near Threatened	Endangered Threatened Special Concern

IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature

COSEWIC – Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada