

**Press Release**



## **Atlantic Tuna Commission Fails Sharks**

*ICCAT leaves porbeagles vulnerable, high seas mako fisheries unregulated, and finning ban weak*

**Agadir, Morocco. November 19, 2012.** Fishing nations at the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) reached consensus on just one of seven proposals for action on sharks. By the end of the eight-day meeting today, ICCAT Parties could only agree to report next year on their compliance with existing shark measures. Proposals to establish ICCAT limits on shortfin mako and porbeagle failed, as did efforts to change existing measures on oceanic whitetip sharks and shark finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea).

For the third year in a row, a European Union (EU) proposal to protect porbeagle sharks failed due to opposition from Canada, the only Party with a targeted commercial fishery for the species.

"Canada's refusal to stop targeted and opportunistic fishing for porbeagle sharks has once again prevented Atlantic-wide protections for this threatened species," said Shannon Arnold, Marine Program Coordinator for the Halifax-based Ecology Action Centre. "Canada's continued insistence on special treatment has led to a breakdown in a process that is critical to international cooperation on shared resources."

An EU proposal to establish catch limits for shortfin mako sharks received general support from the U.S., but was withdrawn due to strong opposition from Japan, China, and Korea. ICCAT scientists assessed shortfin mako sharks over the summer and recommended measures to ensure shortfin mako fishing does not increase.

The U.S. and Brazil blocked China's attempt to overturn ICCAT's ban on sale of oceanic whitetip sharks.

The U.S., Belize, and Brazil were unsuccessful in their fourth attempt to strengthen the ICCAT finning ban by replacing the current fin-to-carcass weight ratio limit with a prohibition on removing fins at sea. The proposal received general support from Taiwan, but was strongly opposed by China, Japan, and Korea.

The European Parliament will vote this Thursday on a European Commission proposal to end shark fin removal at sea, while porbeagles and oceanic whitetip sharks have been proposed for listing at the March 2013 meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) by the EU and the U.S., respectively.

"We are particularly disappointed in ICCAT's repeated failure to heed scientific advice and set limits on exceptionally vulnerable and valuable mako sharks, and yet encourage the U.S. and EU to continue to strive for this important goal," said Sonja Fordham, President of Shark Advocates International. "We are hopeful that the U.S. and EU will succeed in securing CITES measures to bolster ICCAT's oceanic whitetip shark protection and compensate for ICCAT's failure to safeguard porbeagle sharks, and that the EU will soon join the U.S. in promoting stronger shark finning bans on a global scale."

ICCAT Parties did not reach consensus on Japan's proposal to expand data collection on sharks, but did accept the EU's aim to require reports on implementation of the shark measures adopted at ICCAT from 2004-2011 by next year's annual meeting.

**Media contact:** EAC's Shannon Arnold ([sharnold@ecologyaction.ca](mailto:sharnold@ecologyaction.ca)) or SAI's Liz Morley (+1 843.693.5044).

**Notes to Editors:**

Based in Washington, DC, Shark Advocates International (SAI) is a project of The Ocean Foundation working to advance science-based policies for sharks and rays.

The Ecology Action Centre is Atlantic Canada's oldest and largest environmental organization and is the only Canadian conservation group participating in ICCAT meetings.

Shark fins are used in a celebratory Chinese soup. High demand for fins drives many shark fisheries and provides incentive for finning. Many shark species, particularly porbeagles and shortfin makos, are also sought for their meat.

ICCAT scientists have ranked shortfin mako and porbeagle sharks 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, respectively, among 16 shark species in terms of risk of overfishing from ICCAT fisheries.

The IUCN classifies porbeagle, shortfin mako, and oceanic whitetip sharks as Vulnerable on a global scale; porbeagle sharks are categorized as Endangered in the Northwest Atlantic and Critically Endangered in the Northeast Atlantic.

ICCAT is responsible for the conservation of tunas and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. ICCAT has 48 Contracting Parties, including the European Union.

ICCAT adopted protections for bigeye thresher sharks in 2009, oceanic whitetip and hammerhead sharks in 2010, and silky sharks in 2011.