

SAVING SHARKS

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)
28th Session, Bangkok, Thailand



Oceanic Whitetip © Andrew Bellamy

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL
PROGRESS TOWARD CONSERVING
SHARKS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN**

THE 28TH SESSION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC)

PRESENTS A CRITICAL OPPORTUNITY TO CONSOLIDATE AND STRENGTHEN SAFEGUARDS FOR MANY OF THE REGION'S EXCEPTIONALLY VULNERABLE SHARK SPECIES.

Immediate action – based on science and the precautionary approach – is long overdue and urgently warranted to reverse population declines and ensure sustainability over the long term. Significant progress can be made at this meeting to address priority needs to strengthen the finning ban, establish catch limits, mitigate bycatch, assess populations, and improve catch reporting.



A WEAK FINNING BAN

IOTC's ban on shark finning (the wasteful practice of slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea) relies in part on a complicated fin-to-carcass weight ratio that the IOTC Scientific Committee (SC) deemed "ineffective for implementation, enforcement, and monitoring." Extending the ban on at-sea fin removal to all landed sharks (fresh or frozen) can ease the enforcement burden, eliminate wiggle-room to fin sharks, and facilitate the collection of much needed species-specific catch data.



BLUE SHARKS AT RISK

Blue Sharks have been fished — without limit — by Indian Ocean longline fleets for decades. In 2021, the IOTC Scientific Committee warned that maintaining current Blue Shark catches was likely to result in overfishing and depletion in the near future.



THREATENED SPECIES

While the IOTC has prohibited retention of Oceanic Whitetip, Thresher, and Whale Sharks, expanded compliance and bycatch mortality mitigation are still needed to promote survival. Notably, the IOTC SC has warned that half of the Critically Endangered Oceanic Whitetips caught on longlines are dead at haulback. Banning shark lines and wire leaders reportedly has the potential to reduce this mortality by more than 40%¹. Bycatch mitigation measures can also serve as stop-gap ►



Scalloped Hammerhead © Andrew Sallmon

safeguards for other highly vulnerable species that remain unprotected in the region, such as Shortfin Makos, Hammerheads, and Silky Sharks.

The upcoming Shortfin Mako assessment offers hope for much needed catch limits for this exceptionally valuable and slow growing species. The serious and long-standing depletion of North Atlantic Shortfin Makos that resulted from delayed and inadequate management should serve as a cautionary tale to incentivize action by IOTC.

IOTC S28 ACTION

To strengthen the IOTC finning ban by ending exceptions to the best practice for enforcement (requiring that all shark fins remain attached through landing), the Shark League urges Parties to adopt Prop J from the European Union.

Prop V from the Maldives and Pakistan also includes this vital fins-naturally-attached requirement and goes further to streamline and substantially improve the rest of IOTC's shark conservation measures.

We strongly support this proposal, particularly elements that reflect advice from the IOTC SC and are aimed at:

- Increased compliance with shark catch reporting requirements
- Immediate establishment of Blue Shark catch limits
- Development of Blue Shark threshold and target reference points
- An end to exceptions for landing Oceanic Whitetip Sharks
- Mortality reduction through a ban on wire trace and shark lines, and
- Continuing progress toward stock assessment and bycatch mitigation.

In addition, because Mobula Rays are exceptionally vulnerable species in the same subclass as sharks (Elasmobranchii), Res. 19/03 should be included in a comprehensive IOTC "shark" measure, with retention ban exceptions removed.



Blue Shark © Frogfish Photography

The **Shark League** was formed to advance responsible regional shark and ray conservation policies. Shark Advocates International, Ecology Action Centre, Shark Trust, and PADI AWARE Foundation are the coalition's founding members.

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