



**PRESS
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World's Fastest Shark Headed for Disaster

Fishery Managers' Failure Leaves Overfished Makos in Dire Need of EU & International Action

Dubrovnik, Croatia. November 19, 2018. Fishing nations gathered for the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) have failed to address continued overfishing of mako sharks or strengthen the regional ban on shark finning. The fisheries body -- after learning their 2017 measure had fallen far short of its goal of stopping North Atlantic mako overfishing -- took no action to protect the population from collapse. Scientists have recommended a ban on North Atlantic mako retention to rebuild the population over two decades. ICCAT instead, in 2017, narrowed the conditions for landing makos, restrictions that so far appear to have had little effect. ICCAT spent less than 15 minutes out of the eight-day meeting this year reviewing the mako situation; only the U.S., Canada, and Japan took the floor.

"ICCAT has refused to responsibly review and amend a measure for one of the most imperiled species within its purview, and it's simply outrageous," said Ali Hood, Director of Conservation for the Shark Trust. "Most of the blame falls squarely with the EU, who -- despite being responsible for the vast majority of mako catches -- offered no excuse or plan for improvement. We call on all EU Member States to demand the European Commission immediately impose a mako retention ban on EU fleets, as recommended by scientists."

The shortfin mako is one of the world's most economically valuable sharks, sought for meat, fins, and sport. This oceanic species is fished by many nations around the globe yet is not subject to international fishing quotas. Scientists have repeatedly warned that makos' slow growth make them exceptionally vulnerable to overfishing. Depletion is most apparent in the North Atlantic; scientists say catch needs to be cut by ~2/3 (from ~3000t to 1000t) to stop overfishing, and recommend banning retention to give the population a reasonable chance of rebuilding by 2040. Officials recently revealed that roughly 1500t of North Atlantic mako (500t over the annual overfishing threshold) was caught in the first six months of 2018.

The precarious state of mako sharks has led Mexico to propose adding the species to Appendix II of the Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which would prompt a permit system and allow export only if the sharks were found to be sourced from legal, sustainable fisheries. CITES will next consider listing proposals in May 2019.

"It is deeply discouraging to see ICCAT go to great lengths to improve the scientific understanding and monitoring of mako fisheries only to have managers shirk their responsibility to prevent population depletion," said Sonja Fordham, President of Shark Advocates International. "This inaction strengthens the case for listing makos under CITES. While trade controls should be complementary to fisheries management and are alone insufficient to protect sharks, CITES offers the best near-term opportunity to focus international attention on dangerously unsustainable mako fishing pressure."

Twenty-six of the 45 Parties present co-sponsored a proposal to strengthen ICCAT's ban on finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea) by replacing a problematic fin-to-carass ratio with a more enforceable requirement for sharks to be landed with fins attached. As they have repeatedly in the past, Japan, China, and Korea blocked the measure.

"We are dismayed that just a few countries have yet again stood in the way of an enforceable ICCAT shark finning ban proposed by Parties from all sides of the Atlantic," said Shannon Arnold, Marine Program Coordinator for Ecology Action Centre. "Ending at-sea fin removal is a cornerstone of responsible shark fisheries management, and also facilitates the collection of species-specific shark catch data that is sorely needed for assessing population status. We urge ICCAT countries to ensure that this best practice is fully implemented in their waters, regardless of ICCAT's poor decision."

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Notes to Editors: Shark Advocates International is a project of The Ocean Foundation dedicated to securing science-based policies for sharks and rays. The Shark Trust is a UK charity working to safeguard the future of sharks through positive change. Focused on sharks in peril and marine debris, Project AWARE is a growing movement of scuba divers protecting the ocean planet – one dive at a time. Ecology Action Centre promotes sustainable, ocean-based livelihoods, and marine conservation in Canada and internationally. These groups, with support from the Shark Conservation Fund, formed the Shark League of the Atlantic and Mediterranean to advance responsible regional shark and ray conservation policies (www.sharkleague.org). The Shark League’s position statement can be found [here](#).

ICCAT is responsible for the conservation of tunas and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. ICCAT has 52 Contracting Parties, including the European Union.

Countries reporting 2018 catches of North Atlantic makos (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) include (in order of magnitude): EU (Spain and Portugal), Morocco, US, Japan, Korea, Belize, Canada, and Mexico. EU fishing vessels are responsible for 65% of reported catches of North Atlantic shortfin makos from January through June 2018.

In 2017, ICCAT mandated that North Atlantic makos brought to boat alive must be carefully released, unless the country has imposed a minimum size limit (at the length of maturity) or a discard ban (that prevents profit). Dead makos can be still be landed (and sold) by boats under 12 meters, and by larger vessels under certain conditions for monitoring catch and reporting data. More scientific analyses and the development of a rebuilding plan are scheduled for 2019.

Shortfin makos ranked first among 20 pelagic shark stocks for vulnerability to ICCAT fisheries based on Euclidean distance and third overall in an Ecological Risk Assessment for sharks conducted by ICCAT scientists in 2012.

High demand for fins drives many shark fisheries and provides incentive for finning. The current ICCAT finning ban is difficult to enforce because of a complicated fin-to-body weight ratio used to monitor compliance. Requiring that sharks be landed with fins attached (as is required in the EU, US, Canada, Central America, and elsewhere) is the most reliable way to prevent finning, and can also yield species-specific catch data, which is critical for population assessment. Bans on at-sea fins removal have been adopted by the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (2014), the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (2016), and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (2018).

ICCAT Parties proposing a fins-attached rule in 2018, include Albania, Algeria, Belize, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Canada, Côte d’Ivoire, Curaçao, Egypt EU, France (with respect to Saint Pierre and Miquelon), Gabon, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Liberia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Sao Tomé et Príncipe, Senegal, South Africa, UK-Overseas Territories, United States, and Venezuela.