



# PROTECT ECUADOR'S SHARKS

## Presidential Decree threatens shark populations

As of 30th July 2007, the law that prohibited the legal sale and exportation of shark fins and products in Ecuador has been repealed through a Presidential Decree, removing the legal barriers to shark overfishing and shark finning (the process of removing shark fins and discarding the carcass at sea). The President Rafael Correa has repealed Decree 2130, legalising the sale and export of shark meat and fins, with the proviso that fishers demonstrate that the shark is accidental by-catch. Targeted shark fisheries remain illegal in Ecuador, and use of gear or practices that increase shark bycatch are banned, yet sharks accidentally caught can now be certified as by-catch, and legally sold or exported. The rationale behind this is that it will benefit 200,000 Ecuadorian fishermen, and prevent black market trading. However, there is no proposed mechanism to verify whether or not sharks were accidentally caught.



Finned sharks © ScubaZoo

## Galapagos: a marine biodiversity hotspot

Ecuador is home to the Galapagos Islands, a unique archipelago teeming with marine life, including many species of sharks and rays. A centre of endemism and biodiversity, there is almost universal agreement that the Galapagos must be protected.



Shark fins © ScubaZoo

### History of conservation in the Galapagos:

- o 1936 Conservation efforts began in the marine park
- o 1979 Named a UNESCO World Heritage Site, conservation measures introduced, included a ban on commercial sale of sharks from Galapagos waters
- o 1998 Formation of the Galapagos Marine Reserve
- o 2001 Designated UNESCO "Natural Heritage Site"

The repeal of the Decree 2130 does not apply to Galapagos, where the sale, capture, and fishing of sharks are still illegal. However, much of Ecuador' shark catch takes place in Galapagos waters, placing a heavy burden on the enforcement agencies of the Galapagos, which have limited capacity. A WildAid study in 2005 found that up to 80% of sharks and fins landed in mainland Ecuador were caught in Galapagos Island waters. As such, the repeal of Decree 2130 opens the daw to widespread poaching, illegal fishing and finning in the waters of the Galapagos. It is almost impossible to tell where the sharks were caught. The change in Ecuadorian law could prove devastating to sharks of the Galapagos, with wider impacts on marine ecosystems.

### What can you do?

Write a letter to President Rafael Correa, asking for this decision to be reversed immediately by re-instating Decree 2130 and strengthening enforcement against illegal shark fishing and finning throughout Ecuadorian waters, including the Galapagos. Please read our guide to letter-writing, and the following key points:

- o There is widespread concern over the repeal of Decree 2130, which should be re-instituted before irreversible damage is done to the marine environment of Ecuador. Already it has been reported that hundreds of sharks have been killed daily off the coast of Ecuador since the ban was lifted.
- o Laws against shark fishing and sale and exportation of fins and shark products must be restored to avoid illegal overfishing and finning of sharks in the Ecuadorian coast and the Galapagos. Fins are the most valuable part of most sharks, and allowing fins to be traded without strong enforcement measures is tantamount to an invitation to practice finning.
- o Prior to the change in law, Ecuador had some of the world's strongest protection measures for sharks, being one of the few countries to ban targeted fishing and one of about 20 to ban finning.
- o Overfishing and finning of sharks is likely to have significant consequences for shark populations, and could have far-reaching and unforeseen impacts on the wider marine ecosystem.
- o The Ecuadorian Government must of course consider the needs of local fishers, but should not allow targeted fishing of the sharks of the Galapagos and Ecuadorian coast to take place.
- o Sharks grow and mature slowly, making them incredibly vulnerable to overfishing; several of the species caught in Ecuador are already listed in a threat category on the IUCN Red List.
- o The marine resources of Ecuador and the Galapagos are highly valued nationally and internationally, and should be protected and handed down to future generations intact. Shark tourism is an alternative source of generating foreign exchange and creating many jobs.

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