

MEDIA ADVISORY



Historic Opportunity to Safeguard Atlantic Oceanic Sharks

What: Proposals for groundbreaking, Atlantic-wide measures to better prevent shark finning and limit blue shark catches.

Who: Representatives from nations fishing in the Atlantic high seas gathering for the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

When & Where: 14th to 21st November 2016, Vilamoura, Portugal.

Why it's important: Sharks are among the most vulnerable animals taken in high seas fisheries targeting tuna and swordfish. ICCAT has led regional fisheries bodies in adoption of shark measures, but has yet to align its finning ban with best practice or agree basic catch limits for heavily fished blue sharks. Proposals to address these issues, if adopted, would set precedents that could improve the outlook for sharks on a global scale.

Finning bans: The current ICCAT ban on the wasteful practice of finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea) 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 and US) is the most reliable way to prevent finning, and can also yield better catch data, which is critical for population assessment. The "fins-attached" method is gaining support globally. Last year's ICCAT proposal -- spearheaded by the US and EU -- gained 28 additional co-sponsors (of 50 total ICCAT Parties). So far this year, Belize, Gabon, Honduras and Senegal have joined the EU and US in proposing this best practice.

Blue shark catch limits: Blue sharks are fished by many countries as they migrate across entire ocean basins. This species dominates the shark catch from ICCAT fisheries as well as the global market for shark fins, and yet there are no international blue shark limits. To prevent overfishing, ICCAT scientists have recommended capping blue shark catches, but past proposals to do so have failed to gain consensus from ICCAT Parties. Countries reporting significant catches of Atlantic blue shark include (in order of magnitude): Spain, Japan, Portugal, Chinese Taipei, Namibia, Brazil, Ghana, South Africa, Uruguay, and Republic of Korea.

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Notes to editors:

ICCAT is responsible for the conservation of tunas and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. ICCAT has 51 Contracting Parties. High demand for fins (used for a celebratory Asian soup) drives many shark fisheries and provides incentive for finning. Many shark species, including shortfin makos, threshers, and blue sharks are also sought for meat.

The current ICCAT shark proposals can be found at: www.iccat.int/com2016

Ecology Action Centre, Project AWARE, Shark Advocates International, and Shark Trust are collaborating to safeguard Atlantic & Mediterranean sharks through Regional Fishery Management Organizations.