Shark League
for the Atlantic and Mediterranean



ICCAT 2026
Shark Conservation Priorities

The Shark League is focused on rebuilding populations of the most inherently vulnerable species under ICCAT's purview: sharks and rays (elasmobranchs). This year, we urge Parties to enhance the outlook for these slow growing species through:

- Precautionary restrictions on catch (particularly for shortfin mako and blue sharks), and
- Increased scrutiny and monitoring of compliance with existing requirements to report essential fishery information, protect species of concern, and prevent finning.

PRECAUTIONARY CATCH LIMITS

Shortfin mako sharks (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) are among the world's slowest-growing oceanic sharks. Blue sharks (*Prionace glauca*) are more prolific yet still vulnerable relative to tunas. As ICCAT attempts to manage one species for long-term recovery and the other as a model for a sustainable shark fishery, the species' life history differences as well as their tendency to overlap are key factors in management decisions. A precautionary approach is warranted for these sharks and myriad other elasmobranch species taken in ICCAT-managed fisheries.

Safeguard Mako Recovery

The new assessment of North Atlantic shortfin makos, while more optimistic than the last, was plagued by uncertainties that intensify the need for a precautionary approach and argue for staying on the current management course. Whether generation time is 25 or 19 years, the species remains exceptionally slow growing and susceptible to overfishing. Fishing mortality is down but still *more than four times* the current 250t threshold while discards continue to be seriously under-reported. The age validation study needed to resolve core scientific differences will be completed next year; management changes adopted before critical growth parameters are settled waste time and risk disruption of fishing operations, as findings may well contradict the latest picture of productivity and negate any basis for increased catch. Allowing retention even of dead makos creates incentive for irresponsible fishing practices. If scientists confirm in 2027 that stock status is in fact less dire than previously thought, ICCAT has an opportunity to rebuild in *under four decades* by maintaining current limits and fulfilling bycatch reduction objectives.

Ensure Blue Shark Sustainability

ICCAT's management of Atlantic blue sharks offers hope for sustainable shark fishing on an international scale and a model for all other tuna Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs). Effective enforcement of domestic blue shark quotas remains vital to success. ICCAT's Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process for blue sharks is breaking important ground; critical next steps include adopting specific management objectives and directly addressing the significant mortality of shortfin makos taken incidentally in fisheries pursuing blue sharks.





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BETTER INFORMATION AND COMPLIANCE

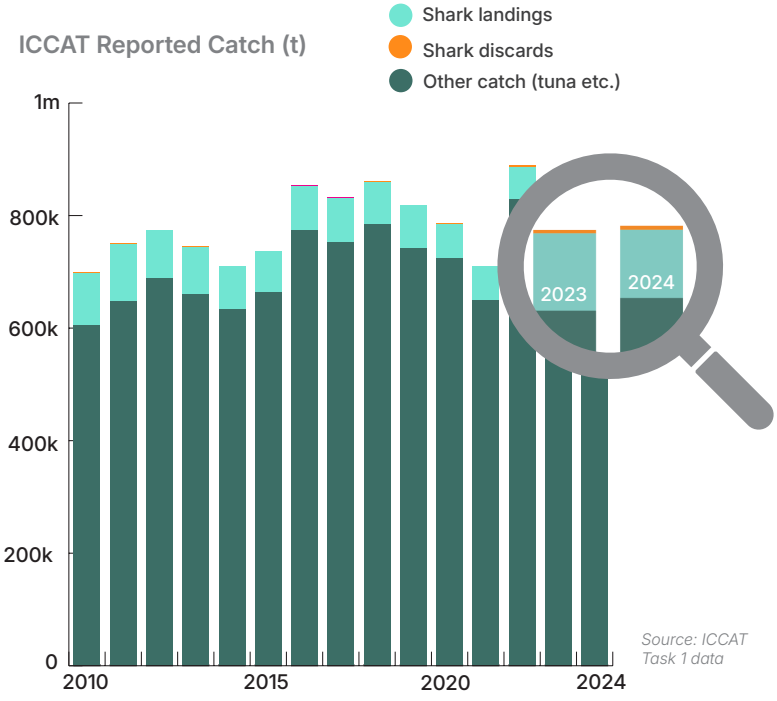
Rigorous monitoring and reliable reporting are fundamental to successful fisheries management and arguably especially important for sharks. While these species' low conservation priority coupled with distinctive reproductive constraints have clearly led to serious declines, uncertainty continues to hinder population assessments, management decisions, and enforcement actions. Scientists on ICCAT's Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) have long advised that such challenges can be mitigated through the proper documentation of shark catch, including discards, and the prevention of shark fin removal at sea.

Increase Observer Coverage

ICCAT's current 5% observer requirement for pelagic longline fleets is inadequate to support robust population assessments for commercial species, reliably record incidental catch of non-target species, and evaluate the efficacy of bycatch mitigation measures. It has been ten years since the SCRS recommended that this coverage be increased to at least 20% to facilitate reliable bycatch estimates for common species. SCRS advises a further increase to at least 50% for properly gauging incidental take of rare species, including several species of highly threatened sharks. The information that would result from increased observer coverage (through human or electronic means) is key to reducing uncertainty in assessments and increasing compliance with a variety of obligations.

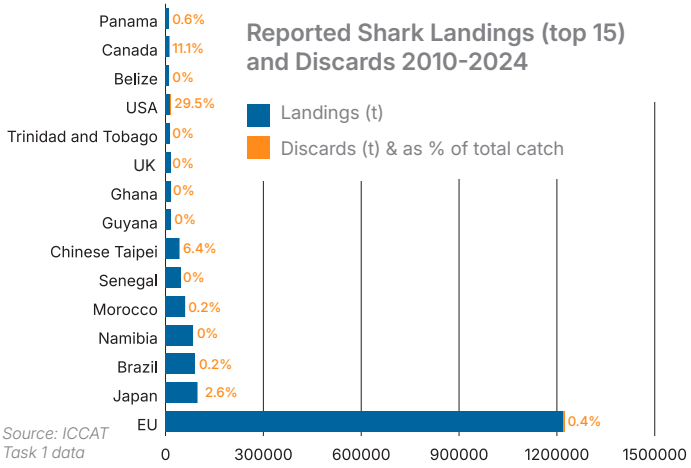
Improve Shark Data Reporting

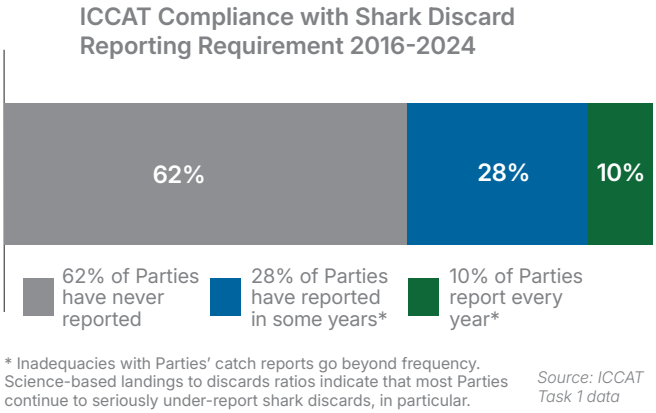
While many ICCAT Parties have improved their reporting of required shark fishery data in recent years, overall performance in this area is still lacking, particularly with respect to discards. Despite clear shark reporting obligations under both general data requirements and species-specific measures, most Parties are failing to consistently provide information on shark catch and regulations with sufficient, species-specific detail.



Source: ICCAT Task 1 data

Most ICCAT Parties Are Not Meeting Their Shark Discard Reporting Requirement





Reporting of live and dead shark discards remains exceptionally poor, highly variable, and inconsistent both within and across countries, leading to serious underestimates and cascading negative consequences.

ICCAT Recommendations outline clear retention prohibitions for Parties that do not meet their shark reporting requirements. Upcoming Compliance Committee deliberations provide a vital opportunity for Parties to scrutinize and address these serious shortcomings.

Strengthen the Finning Ban

ICCAT's complicated fin-to-carcass weight ratio has proven problematic for enforcing the shark finning ban. The complexity and leniency of the ratio make it exceptionally challenging to determine if ICCAT vessels are finning sharks, especially given seriously insufficient observer coverage for longline fisheries.

The ratio also hinders the collection of species-specific information on shark catches that is sorely needed for population assessment and compliance monitoring. Many ICCAT Parties' domestic finning bans have evolved to prohibit the removal of shark fins at sea (through a requirement that sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached) — the only fool-proof means to ensure that finning did not occur.

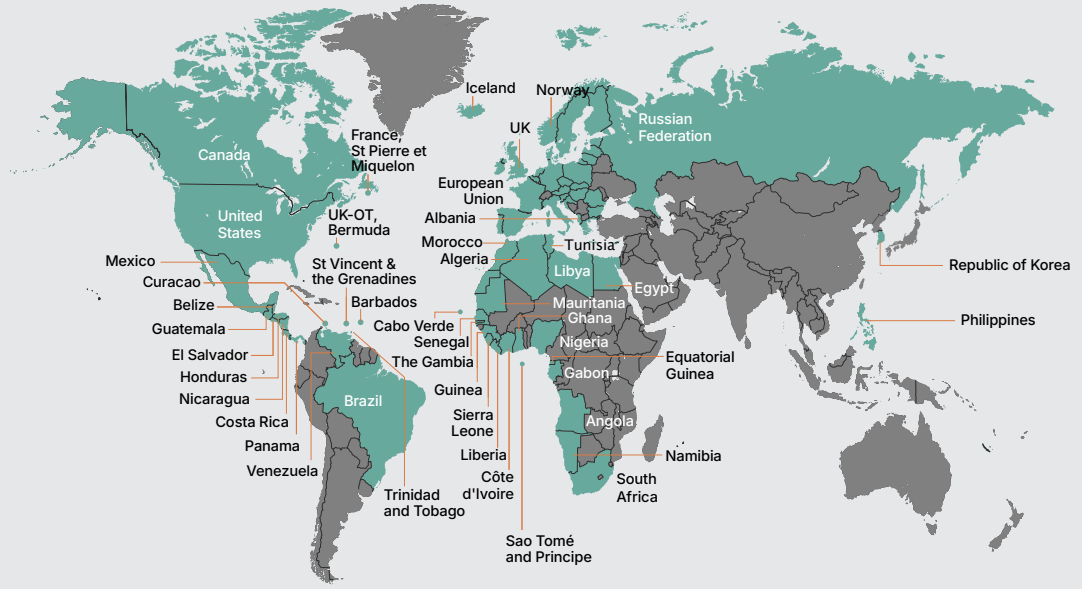
Requiring that sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached can:

- greatly ease enforcement;
- eliminate loopholes to fin sharks without detection;
- prevent high grading of shark parts; and
- facilitate collection of species-specific catch data.

Exceptions that allow shark fins to be removed at sea negate these benefits.

Increasingly accepted as best practice, the fins-naturally-attached method has been mandated by many countries around the world and several other RFMOs. Allowing partial cutting and folding fins against shark bodies addresses safety and storage concerns for frozen as well as fresh sharks.

Parties supporting fins naturally attached proposals at ICCAT in recent years





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Take Care with Consolidation

We prioritize bolstering ICCAT shark measures over consolidating them, given the insufficient agenda time usually allocated to sharks.

Should consolidation efforts proceed, associated proposals should:

- include all existing shark and ray measures (including the mobula retention ban);
- prevent any relaxation of restrictions; and
- eliminate problematic exceptions that allow select Parties to land threatened bigeye thresher (*Alopias superciliosus*), hammerhead (family Sphyrnidae other than *Sphyrna tiburo*), and/or silky sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*).

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The Shark League urges ICCAT Parties at the 2026 annual meeting to:

- Delay consideration of North Atlantic shortfin mako retention until after growth parameters are validated;
- Address mako bycatch through cleaner fishing practices and blue shark MSE objectives;
- Pursue improved reporting of shark landings and national regulation details;
- Prioritize compliance with requirements for reporting discarded sharks (live and dead);
- Adopt a 20% observer (human and/or electronic) requirement for longline vessels and a timeline for reaching 100% coverage;
- Require that sharks be landed with fins naturally attached, without exceptions; and
- Minimize any exceptions in ICCAT measures that perpetuate risk to sharks and rays.

The Shark League for the Atlantic and Mediterranean was formed with support from the Shark Conservation Fund to advance responsible regional shark and ray conservation policies. Shark Advocates International (a project of The Ocean Foundation), Ecology Action Centre, Shark Trust, and PADI AWARE Foundation are the coalition's founding members.

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