



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

EU Fisheries Ministers React to Shark Plan

Shark Alliance vows vigilance for Plan implementation including stricter finning ban

Luxembourg 23.04.09: The EU Council of Fisheries Ministers, expressing concern that fishing is adversely affecting shark populations and ecosystems, today officially welcomed the European Commission's Plan of Action for Sharks. The Council also called for specific follow-up action by the Commission, including, as a priority, a proposal to strengthen the EU ban on shark "finning."

Today's "Council Conclusions," agreed by all EU Fisheries Ministers, serve to encourage and guide implementation of the Shark Plan and set related priorities. Strong conclusions have been a key goal of the Shark Alliance, a coalition of 70 conservation, scientific and recreational organisations formed to secure sound EU shark policies.

"The Fisheries Council's strong response to the Commission's Shark Plan echoes pleas for shark conservation from tens of thousands of European citizens," said Uta Bellion, Director of the European Marine Programme of the Pew Environment Group, "Responsibility to heed these calls now falls back to the Commission through proposals for better controls on shark fishing, starting with a stricter ban on shark finning,"

Highlighting the biological characteristics - slow growth, late maturity, few young - that make most sharks particularly vulnerable to overfishing, the Ministers stressed the need for urgent action and the importance of setting shark fishing limits in line with scientific advice.

The Commission's Shark Plan, released in February 2009, aims to broaden knowledge about sharks, ensure sustainable catches, and harmonize internal and external EU shark policies. The plan also commits to improvements in the EU finning ban, but the Commission has yet to deliver a legislative proposal to do so.

"The Council Conclusions can give the Commission a needed boost for following through with implementation of the EU Shark Plan," added Sonja Fordham, Policy Director for the Shark Alliance. "Shark Alliance member groups across Europe will be vigilant in maintaining momentum for shark conservation so that these exceptional species will be able to rule the seas for generations to come."

The Ministers also asked the Commission to lead international shark conservation initiatives through regional fisheries bodies such as the International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, and global wildlife treaties, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

Related media briefing notes http://www.sharkalliance.org/do_download.asp?did=32652

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Notes to Editors:

The Shark Alliance was initiated, and is coordinated, by the Pew Environment Group, the conservation arm of the Pew Charitable Trusts, a non-government organisation that is working to end overfishing in the world's oceans. www.sharkalliance.org

Finning is the wasteful practice of cutting off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea.

Last year, in conjunction with European Shark Week, over 100,000 people signed Shark Alliance petitions calling on EU Fisheries Ministers to improve EU policies on shark fishing and finning.

Most assessed European shark and ray populations are declining; one third are listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as *Threatened* with extinction. This percentage is much higher than the global statistic (21%).

Weeks ago, the European Commission came under fire from 70 conservation, recreational, scientific and animal welfare organisations for proposing changes to the Indian Ocean finning ban that were out of line with their new Shark Plan and prepared in consultation with the fishing industry but not conservation groups.

There are no international limits on the catch of sharks; the European Commission ensured that all international finning bans conformed to the lenient enforcement methods of the EU.

Germany has spearheaded EU proposals to list spiny dogfish and porbeagle sharks, both *Critically Endangered* and consumed in Europe, under CITES. The next Conference of the CITES Parties in early 2010.