



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Unprecedented Shark Conservation Action taken by Atlantic Tuna Commission *ICCAT Protects Oceanic Whitetip Sharks, Limits Hammerhead Fishing & Improves Mako Measures*

Paris. November 27, 2010. Shark Advocates International is welcoming progress toward conserving sharks made at this week's annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). After considering a record number (six) of proposals for shark measures, the ICCAT Parties agreed to prohibit retention of oceanic whitetip sharks, restrict exploitation of hammerheads, and establish a process for penalizing countries not complying with requirements to report catches and reduce fishing pressure on shortfin mako sharks. Proposals to prohibit retention of common thresher and porbeagle sharks were rejected as was a measure to strengthen the ICCAT ban on shark "finning" by prohibiting the removal of shark fins at sea.

"ICCAT has taken significant steps toward safeguarding sharks this week, but much more must be done to effectively conserve these highly vulnerable species," said Sonja Fordham, President of Shark Advocates International who serves on the US ICCAT Advisory Committee and has participated in ICCAT meetings since 2004. "We are particularly pleased with the agreements aimed at protecting oceanic whitetip sharks and reducing international trade in the fins of hammerhead sharks, as well as US efforts to conserve mako sharks."

The fins of oceanic whitetip and hammerhead sharks are prized for use in the Asian delicacy "shark fin soup." While the oceanic whitetip shark protection agreed is broad, the new ICCAT measure on hammerhead sharks includes explicit exemptions for developing coastal States to fish the species for food and report catches by genus instead of by species. To balance these exceptions, the measure calls on these countries to ensure hammerheads do not enter international trade and prevent increases in hammerhead catches.

A US proposal to limit catches of North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks in line with previous agreements and scientific advice was amended after objections to immediate catch limits were raised by Japan, Korea, and China. Instead, Parties agreed measures intended to improve compliance with requirements for reporting catch and reducing fishing pressure on the population; starting in 2013, retention of shortfin mako sharks will be prohibited for Parties not reporting their catches of the species.

The European Union (EU) failed to achieve consensus on a proposal to prohibit retention of porbeagle sharks due primarily to opposition from Canada, the only ICCAT Party with a targeted porbeagle fishery. The EU was also unsuccessful in attempts to protect common threshers, although Mexico announced the end of its exemption for the ICCAT prohibition on retaining bigeye thresher sharks won by the EU and Brazil in 2009.

The proposal to ban removal of shark fins at sea was offered for the second year in a row by Belize, Brazil, and the US. The proposal was deferred due to opposition from Japan and a desire to focus on other shark actions.

"We urge ICCAT Parties to promptly implement the shark measures agreed this week and to build upon this progress by proposing complementary international safeguards for other oceans and additional shark protections at next year's ICCAT meeting," added Fordham.

Notes to Editors:

Shark Advocates International (SAI) is a project of The Ocean Foundation established to provide leadership in advancing sound policies for sharks and rays through collaboration with a variety of organizations and decision makers. Based on nearly 20 years of shark conservation achievement, SAI uses its expertise to secure science-based limits on shark fishing and trade, protection for endangered species, and stronger bans on finning.

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) is responsible for the conservation of tunas and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. The Convention entered into force in 1969. ICCAT currently reports 48 Contracting Parties (including the European Union).

There are no multi-national fishing quotas for sharks.

Finning is the wasteful practice of slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea. ICCAT adopted the world's first international finning ban in 2004, but the measure has loopholes that stem from weaknesses in the EU finning ban.

The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) classifies scalloped and great hammerhead sharks as Globally Endangered. Smooth hammerheads, porbeagles, shortfin makos, common threshers, bigeye threshers, and oceanic whitetip sharks are categorized as Globally Vulnerable. Species included in the Vulnerable, Endangered, and Critically Endangered IUCN categories are considered by IUCN to be Threatened with extinction. More information at: <http://www.iucn.org/?3362/Third-of-open-ocean-sharks-threatened-with-extinction> . IUCN classifies one-third of oceanic sharks and rays as Threatened.

Proposals to list oceanic whitetip, porbeagle, and hammerhead sharks under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) were defeated at the Conference of the CITES Parties in March 2010, primarily due to opposition from Japan and China.

Norway and Iceland took reservations on the ICCAT oceanic whitetip protection because it conflicts with their national bans on discarding dead fish. Russia also announced a reservation on the oceanic whitetip prohibition. Norway reiterated its reservation during final discussions on the hammerhead measure.