



# PRESS RELEASE

## UK Acts to End Shark Finning

**The Shark Trust marks European Shark Week 2009 by heralding a UK decision to lead in the battle against shark “finning” (slicing off a shark’s fins and discarding the body at sea) with a complete ban on removal of shark fins at sea. The Shark Trust, a founding member of the Shark Alliance, has campaigned against finning and for this groundbreaking policy for years.**

“The UK Ministers’ decision represents a pivotal action in the battle against the wasteful practice of shark finning,” said Ali Hood, Shark Trust Director of Conservation. “The new ban on removal of shark fins at sea is essential for enforcing one of our region’s most fundamental shark fisheries policies and adds significantly to the UK’s solid shark conservation record.”

The EU banned finning and removal of shark fins at sea in 2003, but loopholes in the regulation limit its effectiveness. For instance, under a derogation, EU Member States can grant special permits that allow their fishing vessels to remove shark fins at sea as long as the amount of fins on board is kept under five percent of the weight of shark bodies. The EU’s allowable fin to carcass ratio is the highest in the world and widely criticized for hampering enforcement and data collection while providing room for finning to occur undetected and unpunished. Hundreds of tonnes of shark fin have been landed by the UK fleet under these permits since the EU shark finning regulation was adopted.

Following persistent lobbying by the Shark Trust and their supporters, UK Fisheries Ministers announced their decision to end the provision of these permits, thereby ensuring the UK fleet complies with the original intent of the finning ban – that sharks are landed with their fins naturally attached.

Shark fins can sell for more than £200 per kilo for use in the Asian delicacy *shark fin soup*. The high value of fins in relation to shark meat creates an economic incentive for “finning.” The shark fin trade is a primary threat to shark populations with tens of millions of sharks killed each year for their fins alone. Shortfin Mako, Blue, Silky, Smooth Hammerheads and Thresher Sharks along with deepwater species such as Portuguese Dogfish and Gulper sharks have all been targeted by the UK fleet. Requiring that sharks are landed with their fins attached removes any opportunity to fin, eases the enforcement burden, and facilitates species-specific data collection.

The UK public and Members of Parliament have enthusiastically supported the Shark Trust’s campaign, adding significant voice to the cause. An Early Day Motion, presented to Parliament in early 2009, was endorsed by all parties.

Shadow Environment Minister for the Liberal democrats and sponsor of the Early Day Motion, Martin Horwood commented to the Shark Trust: “When I appreciated that the UK was one of just a handful of EU Member States that still allowed the removal of shark fins at sea I was appalled. The shark finning Early Day Motion demonstrated the strength of support across all political parties. Parliament was calling for the UK to support sound shark conservation measures. I am pleased that Mr Irranca-Davies and Mr Lochhead have ceased the provision of these permits.”

With more than 250 permits between them, Spain and Portugal are now the primary obstacles to an effective EU finning ban and represent the focus of public activities for European Shark Week 2009. UK Ministers are writing to Commissioner Borg to request an urgent review of the Shark Finning Regulation.

### **Editors notes:**

## **The Shark Trust**

Established in 1997, the Shark Trust is the UK registered charity which works to advance the worldwide conservation of sharks through science, education, influence and action. The Trust is led by a board of Trustees who oversee a small dedicated team, who are further supported by a voluntary Scientific Committee, and a growing number of supporters and volunteers.

The Trust is: an effective and well respected advocate for sound shark management and protection; a founder member of the Shark Alliance; the Secretariat of the European Elasmobranch Association; and a membership organisation which provides a link between the public and the science community.

**Shark Finning defined:** Removing a shark's fins at sea and discarding the carcass overboard.

**Removal of Shark fins at sea defined:** The removal of a sharks fins at sea and the retention of the carcass, on EU vessels in accordance with the 5% fin:carcass ratio.

**EU Shark Finning Regulation:** Council Regulation (EC) No: 1185/2003

Article 3 (1) states: it shall be prohibited to remove shark fins on board vessels, and to retain on board tranship or land sharks fins.

Article 4 (1) states: by way of derogation from Article 3 (1) and subject to paragraphs 2,3,4 and 5 of this Article (see attached), it may be allowed to remove shark fins from dead sharks on board and to retain on board, tranship or land sharks with regards to vessels which hold a special fishing permit.

**Special Fishing Permits:** Since the adoption of the EU Finning regulation the UK has issued between 10 and 20 permits per year to UK registered vessels fishing in the North and South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean as far east as the Indonesian archipelago and Western Australian. Fins and carcasses were landed into numerous overseas ports including: Canary Islands , Brazil , Senegal, Namibia, Mauritius, Indonesia, South Africa as well as a number of UK ports. Sharks landed include: Blue, Mako, Thresher, Silky, Smooth Hammerhead, Birdbeak Dogfish, Gulper, Kitefin, Knifetooth, Leafscale Gulper, Longnose velvet, Porbeagle, Portuguese Dogfish, Spurdog plus generic dogfish/sharks.

**EDM No: 1195** on Shark Finning:

*That this House notes that over 70% of UK sharks, skates and rays are categorised by IUCN as Threatened or Near Threatened with extinction, and the recent publication of the European Community Plan of Action for Sharks, and the context of EU legislation prohibiting the removal of shark fins at sea ((EC) No:1185/2003); believes the UK Government should build on the foundation of previous shark conservation actions and lead the way in Europe as a champion of shark conservation, promptly implementing effective shark conservation and management measures; further believes that, on no occasion should the UK government approve any derogation from the shark finning legislation in order to allow UK-registered vessels to remove shark fins at sea; further urges the Government to lead the way in Europe by ceasing provision of special permits to remove shark fins at sea, thus enforcing the original intention of the shark finning legislation, and supporting improved shark fisheries monitoring, management and conservation measures.*

## **European Shark Week**

10<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> October 2009: Predator turned Prey – turning the tide for shark conservation.

An opportunity for Europeans to demonstrate support for shark conservation. [www.sharktrust.org/esw](http://www.sharktrust.org/esw)

European Shark Week is supported by Shark Alliance member groups and sponsored in 2009 by the Save our Seas Foundation.

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