

Members of the European Parliament launch call to close the loopholes in EU ban on shark ‘finning’

Strasbourg 20.09.10: Members of the European Parliament today launched an initiative to press for strengthening the EU ban on shark ‘finning’ – the wasteful practice of slicing off a shark’s fins and discarding the carcass at sea.

The current EU finning ban is among the weakest in the world with loopholes that seriously hamper enforcement. Although the EU finning regulation prohibits the removal of sharks fins at sea, a derogation allows EU Member States to provide fishermen with special permits to ‘process’ sharks, and thereby remove fins, on-board vessels.

The simplest, most effective way to implement a finning ban is to require that sharks are landed whole with their fins naturally attached.

Four MEPs from the ALDE, EPP-DE, Greens-EFA and S&D groups of the European Parliament- Chris Davies from the UK, Sirpa Pietikäinen from Finland, Daciana Octavia Sârbu from Romania, and Jean-Paul Besset from France - today launched a “Written Declaration” inviting all MEPs to join in calling on the Commission to deliver a proposal to completely prohibit the removal of shark fins on-board vessels and provide much needed protection for these vulnerable species.

“For too many European fisheries, the EU ban on finning is the only measure in place that helps curb excessive killing of sharks. The ban must be strengthened to ensure that this incredibly wasteful practice is prevented” explained Chris Davies MEP.

“France has long supported strong bans on shark finning, in European waters as well as in our overseas territories,” said Jean-Paul Besset MEP *“French fishermen are already leaving the fins attached to sharks caught in oceans all over the world, demonstrating that this strategy is entirely feasible. We cannot wait any longer to enforce robust protection for these important predators, which are so key to the balance of life in the sea.”*

“All EU Member States have a responsibility to ensure that EU policies are sound and set a good example for other countries,” added Sirpa Pietikäinen MEP *“It is inexcusable that the current EU finning regulation is one of the weakest in the world. It is high time that the EU heeded the overwhelming scientific consensus that sharks should be landed with fins naturally attached.”*

“Despite the adoption of a Community Plan of Action for Sharks, and a request from the Council for prompt implementation, the Commission’s progress in fulfilling pledges to strengthen the shark finning ban has been slow,” said Daciana Octavia Sârbu MEP. *“We are hopeful that the written declaration will help to raise the priority of this important endeavor and that the Commission will heed our call to send us a proposal for completely ending at-sea shark fin removal by the second anniversary of the EU Shark Plan in February 2011.”*

The Shark Alliance warmly welcomes the initiative and is committed to supporting Members of the European Parliament in their campaign to close the loopholes and prevent shark finning.

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Notes to Editors:

MEPs first called on the European Commission to strengthen the shark finning ban in 2006. In February 2009, the European Commission released the Community Plan of Action for Sharks, which set the stage for sweeping improvements in EU shark policies, including the finning ban. The Commission is now reviewing the regulation with a view to issuing a proposal for the European Parliament in the first quarter of 2011. A consultation on their thinking is expected imminently.

A Written Declaration is a procedure of the European Parliament whereby MEPs present a text to be signed by their colleagues. Written Declarations can be used to launch a debate on a subject within the EU's remit.

If the Written Declaration is signed by a majority of MEPs before 20 December 2010, it is endorsed by the plenary session of the Parliament and forwarded to the Commission, which is currently reviewing the EU regulation on shark finning.

The text of the Written Declaration (no. 71/2010) can be found here:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/plenary/writtenDecl/wdFastOngoing.do?language=EN>

The 'fins naturally attached' method was developed by Costa Rican fishermen to overcome problems of storage on board. The sharks' fins are partially cut and laid flat along the carcass allowing fishermen to process and freeze sharks on-board without cutting the fins off. This method is now used in most Central American countries, as well as some fisheries in Australia and the United States. Landing sharks with fins attached not only effectively halts the practice of finning but also offers vastly improved information about the species caught, vital for robust population assessment and effective shark management

The Shark Alliance is a coalition of more than 100 conservation, scientific and recreational organisations dedicated to restoring and conserving shark populations by improving shark conservation policies.

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.