



**28<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting**

**International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas**

**November 14, 2023**

**Defenders of Wildlife – Statement to the Plenary**

We thank the government of Egypt for hosting this year's annual meeting of the Commission and regret that we are unable to participate in person. This year's agenda contains a number of items that are of importance to Defenders of Wildlife and to the health of marine ecosystems. Below we have provided brief comments on these priority issues. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement.

**Whale Sharks (*Rhincodon typus*) & Rays (family Mobulidae)**

We are concerned that ICCAT lags behind other tuna-focused RFMOs with respect to the adoption of conservation management measures intended to reduce the mortality rates of manta and mobulid rays, as well as whale sharks. While these species are listed under several international wildlife treaties, they are also classified by the IUCN as Endangered and have very low reproductive rates, making additional fisheries safeguards essential for their conservation.

To address this situation and close the gap with other RFMOs, we urge ICCAT CPCs to actively support proposals **PA4-807** and **PA4-808** on whale sharks and manta and mobulid rays submitted by the European Union and the United Kingdom respectively. These two draft recommendations would prohibit the retention of these species, promote their safe release when they are caught, and lead to the collection of data relevant to the management of ICCAT fisheries.

**Blue sharks (*Prionace glauca*)**

With respect to blue sharks, we would like to emphasize that the new SCRS findings show that TAC reductions in the North and South Atlantic are needed to confidently ensure the long-term sustainability of the fisheries. We encourage CPCs to adopt recommendations for both blue shark stocks that align with the SCRS advice and achieve a near-term application of a 70% chance of success. None of the current draft recommendations on blue sharks go far enough.

**Fins Naturally Attached**

Finally, we wish to align ourselves with the growing number of CPCs who have indicated their support for strengthening the ICCAT shark finning ban by adding a requirement that sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached. We urge other CPCs to join them in supporting the latest version of **PA4-809**, without exceptions.