

**Plenary statement****International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas****27th Regular Meeting of the Commission****November 15, 2021**

Defenders of Wildlife is thankful for the opportunity to present this position statement.

**NORTH ATLANTIC SHORTFIN MAKO**

ICCAT CPCs face two broad choices when it comes to the North Atlantic shortfin mako. They can support a complete ban on the retention of the species, which would align with the core recommendation of the SCRS, or they can support an alternative approach that will fail to facilitate the recovery of mako sharks within an acceptable time frame and poses too much risk to the survival of the species.

While we acknowledge that the adoption of any approach that would reduce mortality rates for shortfin makos would be a step in the right direction, we must keep in mind that just because a measure may reduce mortality does not make it adequate. After years of inaction and failure to act, now is the time to listen to the recommendations that have been made to ICCAT for five straight years and unite for the long-term conservation of the species and the marine environment.

There are important reasons the SCRS is recommending prohibiting the retention of shortfin makos rather than saying it would be sufficient to reduce mako mortality. One of the reasons a total ban on retention is needed is because it's simple to understand and enforce and it completely eliminates the incentive to catch the species, which is essential to minimize mortality. To the contrary, the alternative approaches being discussed are complicated and difficult to enforce.

In addition to its simplicity, the adoption of a non-retention policy is the option that is most likely to lead to a favorable outcome for the stock within a reasonable amount of time. According to SCRS, prohibiting the retention of shortfin makos will allow the overfished stock to be rebuilt by 2045 with a 53% probability. While this still represents a long recovery period, every year matters, and that's decades earlier than the stock would be rebuilt under other scenarios provided by SCRS. We also emphasize that anything less than a 70% probability of recovery for the species is completely unacceptable.

Finally, we must also keep in mind that, as SCRS itself has noted, there are many uncertainties associated with the fishery and the biology of the species when projecting 50 years out. This means that the eventual outcomes for the species, particularly when considering measures that would aim to rebuild the stock by 2070, could be much worse than SCRS has projected.

**Given the endangered status of the shortfin mako and the importance of adopting an approach that provides the greatest chance of successfully rebuilding the stock within an acceptable time frame, an immediate and complete ban on retention is the only appropriate measure; and now is the time to adopt it.**

### **FINS NATURALLY ATTACHED**

PA4-807/2021 includes a requirement that sharks be landed with fins naturally attached, the only sure way to enforce a ban on finning.

Shark finning was banned at ICCAT in 2010. However, the status quo would improve if fins were required to be naturally attached because the existing rules are complicated and difficult to enforce. Currently, fins are allowed to be separated from carcasses at sea, but when landed, they must weigh no more than 5% of the “dressed” weight of the shark - that is, the carcass without its head or guts. The problem with this is that it is difficult to identify individual shark species just by looking at detached carcasses or their fins.

The adoption of a fins-attached policy would address this by providing the optimum conditions for the collection of accurate, species-specific data on catches and simplifying enforcement, thereby contributing to the conservation of sharks.

While some have expressed concern about technical difficulties that they believe may arise if a fins-attached policy were adopted, such difficulties can easily be overcome with practice, following the example of countries in Central America and other countries that have successfully implemented these regulations for years.

**Defenders of Wildlife urges ICCAT members to adopt the draft Recommendation to land sharks with fins naturally attached.**