

Statement for the International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Panel 4

The Ocean Foundation, in alignment with other shark conservation observer organizations, appreciates this opportunity to contribute to Panel 4 deliberations.

Closing Gaps in Protections for Endangered Mobula Rays and Whale Sharks

ICCAT is the only tuna RFMO that has not adopted safeguards for whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*) and rays of the family Mobulidae (manta and devil rays). Fisheries management is essential to fulfillment of commitments under various environmental treaties, including obligations for strict protection for Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean Region (SPAW Protocol).

Retention bans and release protocols (as proposed by the UK in **PA4-808** and EU in **PA4-807**) are vital to minimizing bycatch mortality and are in line with 2009 SCRS shark management advice (for precautionary measures to protect low-data species with high vulnerability and conservation concern). Adoption by ICCAT can also bolster existing protections and amplify guidance for maximizing survival.

Ensuring Blue Shark Sustainability

ICCAT has led RFMOs in managing fisheries for blue sharks (*Prionace glauca*), but TACs are too high to ensure long-term sustainability, according to the new stock assessment. The SCRS recommends reducing both regional TACs after determining that the South Atlantic population is being overfished and the current North Atlantic TAC has only a 3% chance of preventing overfishing and maintaining population health over the next decade. Near-term application of the 70% probability standard (warranted for elasmobranchs) results in 2024 TACs of:

- less than 20,000t for the North Atlantic and
- no more than 25,000t for the South Atlantic.

We urge ICCAT to also immediately allocate the South Atlantic TAC among CPCs (to end substantial overages) and direct the SCRS to elevate the priority of a blue shark harvest control rule.

Recovering Shortfin Mako Sharks

SCRS calculations reveal that fishing mortality of North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) remains excessive. To reverse dangerous declines, we urge Parties to:

- extend the North Atlantic retention ban;
- ensure compliance with South Atlantic limits; and
- prioritize bycatch mitigation throughout the Atlantic.

Strengthening the Finning Ban

ICCAT's shark finning ban relies on a complicated fin-to-carcass ratio that is hard to enforce and exacerbates inadequacies in shark catch information. Requiring that sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached (as proposed by the US and many other CPCs in **PA4-809**) can:

- ease enforcement;
- eliminate wiggle-room to fin sharks; and
- facilitate collection of species-specific catch data.

Improving Swordfish Management

We also urge ICCAT to adopt a management procedure for North Atlantic swordfish to set the TAC from 2024 onward.