



Statement by Deutsche Stiftung Meeresschutz (DSM) to Panel 4 of the 29th Regular Meeting of the Commission of ICCAT

WALKING THE TALK FOR SHARKS

Sharks are no longer just facing a crisis but are now on the edge – globally! More than one third of all known sharks and ray species are threatened with extinction with overfishing being the main for most and the only cause for more than 90% of all sharks, rays and chimaeras. And while catches continue being named as 'bycatch', the truth is that 99% of these 'bycatch' species are retained, landed, commercialised and traded¹ making them an important economic factor in many fisheries, but also preventing the implementation of effective bycatch mitigation measures.

ICCAT has been a pioneer in recognising the impact of ICCAT fisheries on shark populations either as a target species in multispecies fisheries, or as an incidental bycatch in tuna fisheries, or in many cases being both. Furthermore, ICCAT has also shown leadership in acting on its responsibility for Atlantic shark populations by the adoption of an increasing number of shark recommendations over the last 10 years.

However, so far these measures have not proven to be sufficiently effective to halt overfishing and / or rebuild overfished stocks. Furthermore, the status of most shark populations in the Atlantic remains unknown. And commercially valuable stocks like blue sharks lack the same type of management that ICCAT is applying to tuna and tuna-like species.

Therefore, this year should mark a continental divide at ICCAT demonstrating that it **can 'walk the talk'** and live up to the expectations made in previous Recommendations and its own commitments for the management and conservation of sharks.

We therefore urge the Commission to make measurable progress for sharks by adopting new Recommendations and following up on the measures outlined in existing ones for

- **the management of targeted stocks like blue sharks by the development of MSE tested MPs**
- **the conservation of shark species that are subject of high mortality from interactions with ICCAT fisheries, in the absence of effective bycatch mitigation measures.**

We hope that CPCs will work together in a collaboratively spirit and succeed in 'walking towards a joint vision of healthy and resilient oceans', recognising that our oceans secure income for fisheries, provide food security for present and future generations, and support livelihoods of coastal communities but are also an inevitable prerequisite for combating climate change. However, to fulfil this role restoring marine biodiversity, healthy stocks of sharks and rays are a *conditio-sine-qua-non*.

We also emphasize that single species approaches are no longer adequate for the management and conservation of tuna and tuna-like species. Instead, we must take an ecosystem-based approach that includes all impacts and interdependencies with the entire ecosystem, including the bycatch of threatened sharks, rays, marine mammals, sea turtles and sea birds.

A comprehensive ecosystem-based approach to the management of stocks includes applying best available science and taking a precautionary approach whenever specific scientific advice is absent or incomplete.

¹ The global status of sharks, rays, and chimaeras; IUCN 2024; ISBN 978-2-8317-2318-1; <https://doi.org/10.59216/ssg.gsrsrc.2024>; Dulvy et al. Chapter 5 Threats; p 79 and <https://saveourseas.com/the-iucns-report-on-the-global-status-of-sharks-rays-and-chimaeras-a-crisis-but-there-are-solutions/>

At Panel 4 we hope seeing progress this year for:

I. Blue Sharks

Northern Atlantic and Southern Atlantic Blue sharks are commercially valuable stocks targeted by several CPCs, but blue sharks are not yet managed according to the same standards as considered necessary for tuna and other commercial stocks.

1. **We welcome the tabling of Proposal PA4-813 on operational management objectives for Atlantic blue shark** as part of the roadmap for the development of MSE tested Management Procedures for both stocks. These management objectives should take a precautionary approach ensuring the short-term, mid-term and long-term sustainability of both stocks with a high probability of success.
2. **We recommend maintaining the previously adopted timeline for the MSE roadmap starting in 2026 and adoption of Management Procedures in 2027.**
3. **We urge all CPCs to improve discard reporting** of sharks and incentivise compliance with existing ICCAT Task 1 and Task 2 reporting requirements. No retention should be allowed for CPCs that do not comply with discard reporting requirements.
4. **We emphasize that improved gear selectivity needs to be prioritised.** Therefore, proposal PA4-815 on the experimental use of traplines is timely but should consider all types of traplines or mekka-ring configurations as currently trialled by CPCs.²
5. **The Commission should consider a retention ban for critically endangered blue sharks in the Mediterranean Sea** as repeated calls for improved reporting in the past have not resulted in improved data availability preventing successful stock assessments.

II. Shortfin Mako Sharks

a) North Atlantic

Despite the agreed objective to limit total mortality limit (TAC) to 250 t annual mortality continues exceeding the TAC substantially and most sharks are discarded dead. Although Rec 21-09 directs that additional measures should then be evaluated and implemented to reduce mortality the Scientific Committee has once again been unable to make recommendations to the Commission.

1. **We therefore urge the Commission to take a precautionary approach and adopt measures for implementation in 2026** based on best available science in the absence of specific advice from the Scientific Committee.
2. **We recommend considering precautionary spatial-temporal closures** to longlines during the summer months around Cape Verde and the central North Atlantic³ and to adopt a documented move-on-rule in case of high concentrations of catches of shortfin mako sharks throughout the year.
3. **We recommend banning the use of wire traces in longlines** at least in areas of high concentration of shortfin mako shark bycatch. Ample scientific studies exist⁴ demonstrating the potential for reducing shark mortality.
4. **We recommend postponing the completion of the stock assessment** until data from the age of maturity studies become available in 2027 confirming the age/size of sexual maturity.

b) South Atlantic

The 2025 stock assessment concluded Southern Atlantic shortfin mako to be overfished with a 66.9% probability.⁵

1. **We urge to immediately reduce total fishing related mortality to 500 t or less*** allowing the stock to recover with a high probability within the next 10 years.
2. **In this context we appreciate proposal PA4-814** on the conservation of the South Atlantic stock of shortfin mako caught in association with ICCAT fisheries. As an alternative to a blanket retention ban we also suggest considering a similar approach as taken for the Northern Atlantic stock in Rec 21/09.

² Daisuke O., et al.; Information about "ring-shaped brnachline (Meka-Ring) in pelagic longline fisheries and research plan; IOTC-2025-WPEB21(AS)-26; https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025/08/IOTC-2025-WPEB21AS-26_mekaring_Ochi_etal.pdf

³ ICCAT SCRS/2025/166 SCRS/2025/078; Báez J.C. et al; Spatial distribution of blue shark and shortfin mako catches in Spanish Longline fisheries in the North Atlantic Ocean.

⁴ Report of the 20th Session of the IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch – Data Preparatory meeting Online via Zoom, 22 – 26 April 2024; https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024/05/IOTC-2024-WPEB20DP-RE_0.pdf

⁵ ICCAT REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND STATISTICS (SCRS) (Hybrid/ Madrid (Spain) – 29 September – 3 October 2025); October 2025; https://www.iccat.int/Documents/Meetings/Docs/2025/Reports/2025_SCRS_ENG.pdf; p 86f

3. **We highlight the importance of closing existing loopholes for non-retention** when CPCs do have national legislation prohibiting the discard of dead fish. A new recommendation should therefore include measures that require such fish to be handed to the port authorities ensuring that fishermen can't take commercial benefits from such fish and no part of them enters international trade.

* including any potential retention of dead animals, dead discards and post release mortality

III. Fins Naturally Attached (FNA) without Exceptions

FNA is globally recognised as the “gold standard” for the enforcement of shark fin bans.

1. **We request the Commission to adopt Proposal PA4-807 for FNA, without exceptions.** The proposal has already gathered many co-sponsors as not allowing for any alternatives to allow enforcement and prosecution of offenses as does PA4 805.
2. **We pledge to all CPCs to join this call and become also co-sponsors.**
3. **We suggest adding a clear definition of ‘sharks’ to avoid ambiguity and enable enforcement of the Fins Naturally Attached Regulation.** Preferably this definition should cover all Chondrichthyes (as in WCPFC CMM 2024-05) but at least include the eight orders of Selachimorpha (*Carcharhiniformes*, *Lamniformes*, *Orectolobiformes*, *Heterodontiformes*, *Squaliformes*, *Squatiniiformes*, *Hexanchiformes*, and *Pristiophoriformes*) and all species of the order of *Rhinopristiformes*, thereby including all species vulnerable to finning due to the value of their fins. (as in IOTC Resolution 25/08)

IV. Improved Conservation of threatened Sharks

Any consolidation of existing retention bans and measures to avoid, reduce and remediate shark bycatch should be done with the objective to remove existing loopholes and strengthen the conservation of threatened species, instead of a copy & paste exercise that bears the risk of weakening existing measures.

2. **We recommend tasking the Subcommittee on Ecosystem and Bycatch to review existing measures intersessionally** and providing a consolidated draft for next year's Commission Meeting including harmonisation and removing or updating outdated provisions especially regarding existing exemptions for developing coastal states from the retention bans of silky sharks and hammerhead sharks and regarding mandatory reporting requirements and provisions to prevent the international trade of such sharks.
3. **We recommend adopting retention bans for *Cetorhinus maximus* and *Carcharodon carcharias* as proposed in proposals PA4-812 and PA4-808.**
4. **We suggest considering a retention ban also for *Carcharias taurus*,** as sand tiger sharks are critically endangered and were listed on CMS App I in 2024.
5. **We urge the Commission adopting Best Handling and Release Practices** including gear specific minimum standards for purse seine, longline and gillnets fisheries adopting the best available science as summarised at IOTC WPEB⁶ in 2025 / compiled by the IATTC scientific staff.⁷



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⁶ IOTC-WPEB21(AS) (2025). Report of the 21st Session of the IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch Assessment Meeting. France and Online, 9 - 13 September 2025; IOTC-2025-WPEB21(AS)-R[E]: 148pp; APPENDIX XXVII

⁷ Melanie Hutchinson, Jon Lopez, Dan Ovando and Marlon Roman; DOCUMENT SAC-16-10 REV UPDATED BEST HANDLING AND RELEASE PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SHARKS IN IATTC FISHERIES; INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE 16TH MEETING; La Jolla, California (USA) 02-06 June 2025