

Ecology Action Centre Opening Statement for Panel 4

Panel 4 has not taken significant actions to reduce shark mortality in the Convention Area in several years. With growing support for many proposals and recommendations to cap or reduce mortality from the SCRS, Panel 4 has the opportunity address sharks by taking the following actions this year:

- **Support a proposed ‘fins naturally attached’ regulation this year to strengthen the safeguard for sharks**

ICCAT was the first RFMO to ban shark finning, but loopholes exist with the 5% rule, which mean illegal shark fins are still being landed. Requiring sharks to be landed with fins attached at the first point of landing is the most straightforward way of enforcing the finning ban and will greatly improve species-specific data collection for sharks.

- **Prohibit the retention of porbeagle sharks in the ICCAT convention area**

According to the SCRS, porbeagle sharks are one of the most vulnerable sharks in the ICCAT area; they have also been assessed as Endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Furthermore, SCRS advises that precautionary management measures should be considered for shark stocks where there is the greatest biological vulnerability and conservation concern.

- **Establish precautionary catch limits for both shortfin mako and blue sharks**

The SCRS continues to recommend that fishing mortality should not increase for shortfin mako. Specifically, the “Committee reiterates, as a precautionary approach, that catches of shortfin mako sharks should not be increased with respect to the 2006-2010 levels until more reliable stock assessment results are available for both the Northern and Southern stocks.”

The SCRS Ecological Risk Assessment has also identified blue sharks as vulnerable and recommends measures to ensure catches stay within the Convention Objective. This year, the SCRS recommends that, “methods for mitigating shark by-catch by these fisheries also need to be investigated and applied.” Further, the Committee recommends that recent catch levels (2009-2013) should not be increased for the South Atlantic stock of blue sharks. While the Committee could not reach a consensus on a specific management recommendation for the North Atlantic stock, the Commission needs to act with precaution to ensure sustainable harvest of blue shark is maintained before this shark becomes as depleted as other shark species in the Convention Area.