

U.S. STATEMENT TO PANEL 4 - SECOND ROUND

The United States has had the pleasure of a number of discussions with Panel 4 members and the Panel 4 Chair regarding the need to advance the conservation of the North Atlantic shortfin mako stock. As part of this effort, the United States offered a proposed rebuilding program, PA4_805, as well as an informational paper, PA4_807, on Best Practices. The latter explained how, in 2019, the United States achieved a mortality reduction in excess of 80% in its fisheries through full compliance with the requirements of Rec. 19-06. Consistent with that recommendation, we ensure live release by all U.S. pelagic longline vessels, regardless of the size of the vessel, and we confirm the mortality status of North Atlantic shortfin mako at haulback by requiring observers and 100% electronic monitoring on the fleet. For our recreational fishery, we established a large minimum size limit. Beyond these ICCAT requirements, we require the use of circle hooks in both commercial and recreational fisheries. Other 'best practices,' such as monofilament leaders and safe handling and release techniques, are used in these U.S. fisheries as well.

The United States is unaware of any other CPC that has achieved a mortality reduction in their fisheries of this magnitude.

Furthermore, the mortality reduction accomplished as a result of our suite of measures exceeds the level identified by the SCRS as necessary to end overfishing and begin rebuilding - and, notably, it was accomplished without the application of a TAC or requiring a strict no retention policy. U.S. fisheries represent only a small portion of overall fishing mortality on the stock, however, and strong action by other CPCs is critical to ending overfishing and rebuilding shortfin mako. By following this proven model, we believe that other CPCs can achieve comparable mortality reductions in their fisheries and achieve the objective that each of us has been charged with, namely to immediately end overfishing and to rebuild this stock.

The United States is disappointed that the discussions among the proponents of the shortfin mako proposals have not yet been able to achieve consensus. Thus, after careful consideration of the many important points raised in these discussions, the United States has concluded that action should be taken without delay to implement an approach that focuses on the responsibility that each CPC has to reduce its own mortality consistent with the goals of Rec. 19-06. We must still respectfully point out that the proposals offered by other Panel 4 members do not adequately or equitably achieve the conservation goals articulated by the SCRS. The United States, therefore, strongly urges CPCs to implement the provisions of Rec. 19-06, and, specifically to adopt this "Best Practices" model during this correspondence process.

In doing so, ICCAT would be on a clear path to meet mortality reduction goals and achieve the objective to end overfishing and begin to rebuild this stock in line with the ICCAT Convention. The United States is certainly committed to consult with other CPCs on how they, too, can best implement those measures in their fisheries to achieve needed mortality reductions.

If CPCs choose not to follow the U.S. approach, their individual obligation nevertheless remains under Rec. 19-06 to reduce mortality to a level that will stop overfishing and begin rebuilding the stock. To achieve this will require proportional reductions from all CPCs of greater than 80% from the pre-assessment (2017) catch levels. Lack of consensus on a new measure this year does not in any way diminish this standing obligation.

We would also stress that it is essential for all CPCs to report fully on their implementation of Rec. 19-06, particularly through the shark implementation check sheet. We note that a number of CPCs did not submit updated check sheets this year with this information. Next year, review of this information should be a priority area for the COC. It is similarly essential that all CPCs report accurate data on landings and discards under Task I, as well as in their observer data.