

ICCAT 2022 Panel 4

Opening Statement

Ecology Action Centre

Ecology Action Centre appreciates this opportunity to encourage ICCAT action to improve fishery management for sharks through mako protections, blue shark allocation, and finning ban improvement.

One year ago, ICCAT at last took critical steps to protect exceptionally vulnerable and valuable **shortfin makos** in the North Atlantic. We are eager to see the essential ban on retention extended at least until rebuilding is demonstrably underway and expanded to the South Atlantic, as proposed by the EU, to facilitate enforcement and address that population's likely increasing risk.

We remind Parties that retention bans are:

- straightforward and readily enforceable
- essential for removing incentives to encounter and kill valuable, threatened species
- the most common shark conservation measure imposed by ICCAT and its Parties
- particularly promising for sharks with high post-release survival rates, such as makos
- less restrictive than closing entire fisheries.

We also urge Parties to improve upon this year's shortfin mako proposal by adding safeguards for similarly vulnerable longfin makos and establishing the probability of success standard at 70%, as is appropriate for such slow growing species.

More broadly, the need for measures to minimize mako bycatch and associated mortality -- such as closed areas and circle hooks -- continue to be pressing throughout the Atlantic.

Regarding **blue sharks**, we are concerned that the success of ICCAT's ground-breaking South Atlantic TAC is being jeopardized by overages stemming from the lack of Party allocations. To ensure sustainability of the population and fishery, we urge such action without further delay.

We once again welcome the exceptionally popular proposal to strengthen ICCAT's **shark finning** ban by requiring sharks to be landed with fins naturally attached. Such a policy is widely accepted as the best practice for finning ban implementation and can also facilitate sorely needed, species-specific data on shark catches. These benefits led the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) to require fins-naturally-attached policies for all fisheries that retain sharks under its newly released Standard. A recent Mongabay exposé demonstrates that wasteful, illegal shark finning is still a significant global problem. It is high time that ICCAT left problematic fin-to-carcass ratios in the past and eased finning ban enforcement by adopting PA4-805.

As the lack of shark catch information continues to hinder assessment and enforcement, we remind Parties of the obligations and penalties associated with timely reporting of catches, including dead discards.

In short, ***difficult-to-enforce half measures are not enough to conserve vulnerable sharks***. We urge ICCAT to take these critical steps.

Thank you for considering our views.