

Statement for ICCAT Panel 4

The Ocean Foundation, in concert with other observer organizations, appreciates this opportunity to contribute to Panel 4 deliberations and urge the following actions.

Strengthen the Shark Finning Ban: ICCAT's finning ban relies on a complicated fin-to-carcass ratio that is hard to enforce and exacerbates inadequacies in catch information. Requiring that sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached, *without exceptions* (as proposed by more than 20 CPCs in **PA4-806**) can:

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

Enhance Implementation: We appreciate the interest in streamlining processes associated with ICCAT's shark measures but urge Parties to focus on changes needed to improve compliance, particularly the establishment of a procedure for the SCRS and Compliance Committee to evaluate Parties' requests for exemptions to shark data requirements and/or fishing restrictions. Such a process is essential to guiding national implementation of many critical measures and should be prioritized over the shark measure consolidation proposed in **PA4-805**. Should consolidation proceed, we strongly oppose any relaxation of existing conservation measures and support eliminating problematic exceptions that allow select Parties to land threatened bigeye thresher, hammerhead, and silky sharks.

Close Protection Gaps for Mobula Rays and Whale Sharks: ICCAT is the only tuna RFMO without safeguards in effect for whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*) and rays of the family Mobulidae (manta and devil rays). Retention bans and release protocols are vital to minimizing bycatch mortality and are in line with 2009 and 2023 SCRS advice (for precautionary measures to protect low-data elasmobranch species with high vulnerability and conservation concern). Such action also can bolster national protections, amplify guidance for maximizing survival, and help to fulfill obligations under environmental treaties, (such as the Convention on Migratory Species and the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean). We urge adoption of **PA4-804** so that pending 2023 Recommendations for these endangered species can enter into force.

Recover Shortfin Mako Sharks: SCRS calculations reveal that fishing mortality of North Atlantic shortfin makos (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) remains excessive. To reverse dangerous declines, we urge Parties to improve compliance with mandates to minimize incidental mortality, including through a focused intersessional in 2025 (in line with proposal **PA4-811**).

Ensure Blue Shark Sustainability: We fear that several ICCAT Parties appear to be on track to exceed their catch allocations for South Atlantic blue sharks (*Prionace glauca*). We urge immediate action to ensure compliance with these essential limits. We also encourage the SCRS to develop harvest control rules for both blue shark populations.

Improve Swordfish Management: We urge ICCAT to adopt a North Atlantic swordfish management procedure for setting the TAC in 2025 and onward.