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Conserving Migratory Sharks & Rays: Priorities for Action

Overview

Governments gathering to discuss the next steps in implementing the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Sharks have an important opportunity to make real progress in addressing the global plight of sharks and rays, particularly the 29 species currently listed on the CMS Appendices. Beyond adding species and working groups to the CMS MoU scope of work, there are multiple avenues for immediate, concrete action that can go a long way toward fulfilling CMS obligations for listed species, as well as broader commitments to cooperate toward better protection for these vulnerable animals.

Background

Our organizations welcomed the 2010 CMS MoU for the seven shark species listed between 1999 and 2008, participated in development of the 2012 Conservation Plan to promote MoU objectives, and celebrated the historic listing of 21 additional species (15 rays on Appendix I & II and six sharks on Appendix II) in 2014.

Shark species covered by the CMS Sharks MoU, after listings from 1999 to 2008:

- **Whale shark** (*Rhincodon typus*)
- **White shark** (*Carcharodon carcharias*)
- **Basking shark** (*Cetorhinus maximus*)
- **Porbeagle** (*Lamna nasus*)
- **Spiny dogfish** (*Squalus acanthias*)
- **Shortfin mako** (*Isurus oxyrinchus*)
- **Longfin mako** (*Isurus paucus*)

CMS Appendix II

CMS Appendix I & II

Shark & ray species listed in 2011 & 2014, not yet covered by the Sharks MoU:

- **All five species of sawfish** (Family Pristidae)
- **All nine species of devil rays** (*Mobula* spp.)
- **Both manta rays** (*Manta* spp.)
- **All three thresher sharks** (*Alopias* spp.)
- **Great hammerhead** (*Sphyrna mokarran*)
- **Scalloped hammerhead** (*Sphyrna lewini*)
- **Silky shark** (*Carcharhinus falciformis*)

Through the CMS Sharks MoU and Conservation Plan, signatories have agreed, *inter alia*, to:

- facilitate a better understanding of shark populations and fisheries
- set science-based catch limits in an effort to ensure sustainable fishing
- prevent “finning” (slicing off a shark’s fins and discarding the body at sea)
- cooperate toward shark conservation through international bodies, and
- protect critical shark habitats.





Impact

As the first intergovernmental treaty dedicated to global shark conservation, the CMS MoU has bolstered efforts to safeguard these vulnerable species, through both awareness and action. Listings on the Appendices, in particular, have been a major factor in numerous domestic protections while also serving to highlight at-risk species for other international fora. Nearly four years after adoption of the Conservation Plan, however, concrete actions to fulfill MoU goals remain insufficient. For example, the following are regrettable:

- The lack of species-specific regional plans for listed shark species, even the first to be listed (whale sharks)
- The absence of Regional Fishery Management Organization (RFMO) catch limits for shortfin mako sharks
- The repeated defeat of US and EU proposals to cap shortfin mako landings through ICCAT¹
- Exceptions to the protections for manta and devil ray (mobulids) adopted last year by the IATTC²
- Continued fishing and lack of national protections for mobulid rays, particularly *Mobula* species
- Weak national and international finning bans that rely on complicated fin-to-body ratios for enforcement
- Little cooperation among countries aiming to recover shared porbeagle and spiny dogfish populations
- The small proportion of Signatories submitting national reports.

Call to Action

In addition to expanding the MoU's scope to cover all shark and ray species listed on the CMS Appendices (adding the 22 species listed in 2011 and 2014 to MoU Annex I), and in line with appropriate amendments to the Conservation Plan (MoU Annex 3), associated work program, priorities and strategy, we urge CMS Parties and Non-Party Signatories to take the following concrete steps:

- Ensure strict national protection for all Appendix I listed species, especially those listed by IUCN as *Endangered* or *Critically Endangered* (all sawfish in Family Pristidae and giant devil ray *Mobula mobular*)
- Co-sponsor and actively promote EU/US-led efforts to establish shortfin mako catch limits under ICCAT
- Develop and promote proposals to establish shortfin mako catch limits at other relevant RFMOs
- Seek to end exceptions to the mobulid ray protections adopted in 2015 by IATTC
- Develop and promote proposals to protect mobulid rays through other relevant RFMOs
- Support proposals to list mobula rays, thresher sharks, and silky sharks under CITES³ Appendix II
- Ensure national finning bans include best practice prohibitions on at-sea fin removal, *without exception*
- Co-sponsor EU/US-led proposals to strengthen RFMO finning bans by prohibiting at-sea fin removal
- Establish active inter-sessional working groups to focus on specific regional conservation priorities
- Encourage neighboring countries to sign the Sharks MoU
- Complete and submit in a timely manner national progress reports to the CMS Secretariat
- Consider proposing to list depleted angel sharks and guitarfishes as well as heavily fished blue sharks.

Our organizations are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with Signatories as Cooperating Partners under the MoU. Through actions like those urged above, we can ensure a brighter future for sharks and rays.

Shark Advocates International is a project of The Ocean Foundation working to safeguard sharks and rays through sound, science-based conservation policy. Supporting work in more than 35 countries, Humane Society International is one of the only international organizations working to protect all animals. The Shark Trust is a UK charity working to advance the worldwide conservation of sharks through science, education, influence and action. Project AWARE Foundation is a growing movement of scuba divers protecting the ocean planet – one dive at a time. Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities.



¹ International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas

² Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission

³ Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora