



## Building a solid Community Plan of Action for Sharks

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## Presentation Overview

- International Plan of Action for Sharks
- Commission consultation document
- Impacts of EU shark fisheries
- Shark fisheries, trade & finning
- Vision for a Community Plan of Action
- Field by Field suggestions



## FAO International Plan of Action

To ensure conservation, management & longterm sustainable use of sharks

Calls on fishing nations & RFMOs to develop National & Regional **Plans of Action** for Sharks to:

- Ensure catch is sustainable
- Collect data; consult stakeholders
- Provide special attention to threatened/vulnerable stocks
- Minimize waste
- Protect biodiversity, ecosystem function
- Promote international, bilateral cooperation
- Shark Plans due to FAO in 2001
- Number of NPOAs growing, no Regional Plans of Action

## European Community Plan of Action for Sharks (CPOA)

- Overdue, but Commission now committed
- Expects completion by Dec. '08
- Stakeholder consultation document:
- Released late 2007
- Comments accepted through Feb. 15
- Nine fields of action covering data collection, research, habitat, catches, effort, finning, threatened species, etc.
- Potential to be one of the world's most meaningful Plans of Action



**More than 130 species of sharks & rays in European waters**

**The EU has a lead role to play in shark fishing & conservation around the world:**

- Large direct and incidental catches
- Strong influence in global bodies and examples for developing fishing countries.

## Shark Fisheries & the EU

Sharks & rays targeted in European waters, and around the world by EU vessels, with very few rules.

Sharks sought for:

- meat
- liver oil (used in cosmetic & pharmaceutical products)
- fins for Asian delicacy, "shark fin soup"



Sharks & rays are also taken incidentally as "bycatch" in fisheries targeting other species (kept or discarded).

## Shark trade & the EU

The European Union is a significant player:

- **global catch**
- **consumption**
- **trade** of sharks & rays.



In 2004, Europe responsible for:

- ~30 % of the world's imports and
- ~40 % of world exports of shark products.

## Sharks are Vulnerable

- Because most sharks:

- Grow slowly
- Mature late
- Produce few young



- Fishing pressure can easily deplete shark populations.

- Such damage often requires decades, centuries to repair.

- Most European targeted shark fisheries have declined along with shark populations.

## Sharks in Trouble

- One-third of European shark populations assessed by the IUCN are considered **Threatened** with extinction.

- Mediterranean- highest % in world, so far (42%)

- At least two species of European rays - "common" skate & "common" sawfish – thought locally extinct



## Shark Fin Trade from Europe

- Europe's participation in Hong Kong fin market has increased dramatically

- From insignificant levels

- to 1/3 of total imports

- Fins (for soup) worth more than bodies

- Economic incentive to "fin"

- "Finning" = taking fins, discarding body at sea

- EU banned finning in 2003, but

- Loopholes in the regulation remain



## EU Finning Ban Opportunities for Improvement

- EU Finning Regulation allows for landing fins & carcasses separately
- Bans removal of fins at sea, but allows for exceptions under special fishing permits
- Caps "fin to carcass" ratio at 5% of whole weight when most advice dictates 2%
- Finning can therefore continue under limits
- EU fin to carcass ratio replicated in intl finning bans, makes them ineffective too



## Finning bans: scientific advice

- 2006, EU scientists reviewed EU fin situation at technical workshop, 2007 report

- Concluded ratios complicated, unreliable

- Fins should remain attached:

- Better enforcement
- Improved species-specific collection data
- Underscores previous tech. advice



## Context: Wide ranging effects

- Most sharks are important predators in marine ecosystems, key to ocean balance
- EU = major power at most int'l fisheries & wildlife organizations
- Therefore, EU shark regulations have wide ranging implications for the health of world's oceans



## Shark Alliance Vision for a Community Plan of Action for Sharks

We envision the CPOA as umbrella document to:

- Address EU & int'l waters
- Not only review situation
- Also commit to concrete limits on fishing
- Map out future initiatives
- Cover actions by fisheries & environment administrations
- Other actions more immediate, should be built in



## Commission consultation paper

### Sound objectives aimed essentially at ensuring:

- A deeper understanding of sharks, their role in ecosystems & the take of sharks in fisheries;
- Sustainable directed shark fisheries and properly regulated bycatch; and
- A coherent approach between internal and external Community fishery policies for sharks.

## Key Points for Field of Action #1

### *Facilitate improved species-specific catch information*

Shark Alliance supports Commission proposals to:

- increase investment in collection and verification of species-specific shark fisheries data at landings sites, *but also at sea*.
- promote Regional Plans of Action for sharks and close attention to related commitments made through CITES.

## Key Points for Field of Action #2

### *Facilitate collection of species-specific biological and trade data*

Shark Alliance supports Commission proposals to:

- increase observer coverage and improve reporting of shark trade by species, and
- record all landings and trade of shark separately by commodity and to the species level.

In addition, Shark Alliance proposes:

- consideration of video monitoring,
- a broader scope of shark products to include teeth, hides, cartilage and whole specimens.

## Key Points for Field of Action #3

### *Assess threats to populations, identify & protect critical habitats*

Shark Alliance supports Commission proposals to:

- regularly assess status of shark populations,
- determine levels of fishing mortality on sharks,
- study and protect key habitats where sharks congregate & can be vulnerable to fishing

Shark Alliance also proposes:

- determination of sustainable levels of fishing and/or precautionary catch limits in data-poor situations.

## Key Points for Field of Action #4

### *Research threats to shark populations associated with **biology & bycatch***

Shark Alliance supports Commission proposals to:

- improve understanding of shark life history traits & ecological impacts of shark depletion,
- investigate means of reducing shark bycatch and discard mortality for unwanted and non-commercial species.

In addition, Shark Alliance proposes:

- Aiming to *minimise*, not just reduce, bycatch
- For *protected, threatened & unmanaged* species as well.

## Field of Action #5

### *Improve stakeholder consultation and awareness*

Shark Alliance supports Commission proposals to:

- educate fishermen & public re: shark status & rules,
- consult the RACs for best practices for bycatch reduction,
- offer greater public access to shark fisheries info.

In addition, Shark Alliance proposes that the Commission:

- Publicize information regarding safe handling & release of sharks (to minimise harm to fishermen & sharks).

## Field of Action #6

### *Adjust **fishing effort** to ensure sustainability*

Shark Alliance supports Commission proposals to:

- Adjust fishing effort to available resources, in line with FAO agreements & EU fishing capacity reduction goals.
- restrict fishing in key habitats of *endangered* sharks.

## Field of Action #7

### *Adjust **catches** to ensure sustainability*

Shark Alliance supports Commission proposals to:

- limit shark catch in line with scientific advice,
- improve gear selectivity and reduce/ *minimize* discards of sharks,
- establish time/area closures in areas where sharks aggregate, and
- make exceptions to discard ban for sharks with a chance to survive.

Shark Alliance further proposes:

- options for size limits & gear restrictions (based on innovation),
- precautionary restrictions in the meantime,
- responsible timelines for management & recovery,
- further exceptions to the discard ban for protected species & those considered by IUCN as *Threatened*.

## Field of Action #8

### *Minimize waste & discards of sharks by **improving finning bans***

Shark Alliance asserts the best way to strengthen finning bans is to:

- eliminate derogation that allows fins to be removed on board vessels.

Short of that, the following Commission proposals are improvements:

- require the landing of fins & carcasses at same time, same port, and
- reduce the fin to carcass ratio to 5% of *dressed* weight.

Shark Alliance opposes Commission proposals to:

- Allow exceptions for higher ratios.

## Field of Action #9

### *Provide special attention to **threatened shark populations***

Shark Alliance supports Commission proposal to:

- afford special, prioritized protection species considered by IUCN as *Endangered* or *Critically Endangered*
- Establish EU & RFMO bycatch reduction/minimization programs & time/area closures for these species

Shark Alliance further proposes that:

- Protection from fishing (prohibitions on fishing, retention & landing) be included as possible tools, and
- International initiatives include protective action for threatened sharks through wildlife treaties.

### Q: What are the likely socio-economic effects of actions?

- Depletion of sharks can take decade/centuries to repair.
- Long-term sustainability depends on science-based restrictions & caution in the absence of certainty.
- Long-term economic and social benefits of conserving sharks generally outweigh short-term costs.
- Social & economic impacts of not managing sharks serious for shark fishers & those taking sharks as bycatch.
- Negative economic impacts possible from associated declines in the health or abundance of prey/competitor populations, as a consequence of removing top predators.

### Q: What are the likely environmental effects of actions?

- Most sharks serve as top predators, thereby key to keeping marine ecosystems in balance.
- Scientists warn consequences of removing top predators, although difficult to predict, will likely be negative, cascading & often counter-intuitive.
- Precautionary, science-based shark conservation programs can prevent population depletion and thereby ensure proper functioning of ocean ecosystems.



We welcome your interest and participation in this initiative.

Thank you for your attention.

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