

# International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)

## Shark Conservation Progress & Priorities



Sharks deserve special conservation focus because low reproductive capacity leaves most species exceptionally vulnerable to overexploitation. International and domestic fisheries management improvements are urgently needed to protect these vulnerable species from overfishing and finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea).

The Shark League has been working toward the following through ICCAT:

- Clear scientific advice for heavily fished blue and mako sharks
- Science-based, Atlantic-wide limits on fishing these species, and
- A stronger ban on shark finning.

For the many sharks and rays that are fished by several countries, the international actions by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) have the potential to swiftly safeguard species throughout their ranges.

### Progress since 2016

Shark fisheries management actions taken at ICCAT should prompt essential limits by key fishing nations, particularly in the European Union (which takes the most Atlantic sharks), as well as similar measures for other oceans.

The following steps taken over the last two years represent ICCAT's recent shark conservation progress:

- Scientific advice for establishing limits on Shortfin Mako and Blue Shark catches
- A threshold for catches of North Atlantic Blue Sharks
- A binding measure aimed at promoting the release of live North Atlantic Shortfin Makos, and
- Overwhelming support for a stronger ICCAT ban on finning.



### Make Time for Makos

Since a 2008 Ecological Risk Assessment for sharks, scientists have warned that Shortfin Mako Sharks (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) are exceptionally vulnerable to ICCAT fisheries. Over the last decade, ICCAT has prohibited the retention of several other shark species, yet failed to set even basic limits on makos.

The 2017 assessment of North Atlantic Shortfin Makos was alarming. ICCAT scientists report that:

- Overfishing is occurring on an overfished population (90% chance of both)
- Declines will continue under current catch levels
- Catch must be cut to zero in order to have a 54% chance of rebuilding by 2040
- Banning retention is the most effective immediate step
- Additional bycatch mitigation measures are also needed.

In response, ICCAT took only a first step toward preventing further declines in this population. Instead of the recommended ban, a 2017 ICCAT measure mandated that Shortfin Makos brought to the boat



Kobe phase plot for North Atlantic shortfin mako showing current status (2015) based on all assessment models used. Concentration of the plots in red quadrant indicates the combined probability from all the models of being in an overfished state while still experiencing overfishing was 90%. Ref: SCRS 2017 SHK-Figure 9.

alive be carefully released, unless the Party has a minimum size limit or a discard ban that prevents profit. Dead makos can still be landed by boats under 12 meters, as well as by larger vessels under certain conditions for monitoring catch and reporting data. Implementation of these already insufficient measures at the domestic level is far from complete. ICCAT scientists will evaluate implementation progress in 2018 and begin development of a rebuilding plan in 2019.

The status of South Atlantic Shortfin Makos is less clear. Scientists' recommendation for a 2,000t limit has yet to be adopted. Considering the enforcement challenges, species' vulnerability, and lessons from the North, a ban on retention is more prudent in the face of this uncertainty.

Post-release survival of Shortfin Makos can reach 70%. Prohibitions on retention can therefore be quite effective for reducing mortality.

Countries landing North Atlantic Shortfin Makos include (in order of magnitude for 2011–2016 reported catches) Spain, Morocco, Portugal, US, Japan, and Canada. Countries landing South Atlantic makos include Spain, Namibia, South Africa, Portugal, Taiwan, Japan, and Brazil.

## Blue Sharks at Risk

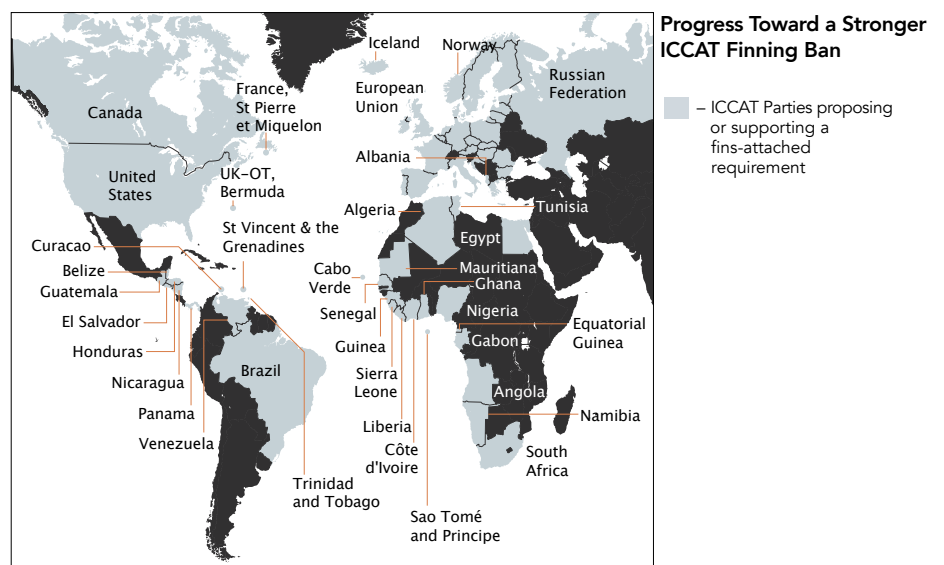
Landings of North Atlantic Blue Sharks (*Prionace glauca*) are on track to exceed a ~39,000t threshold established by ICCAT in 2016, thereby triggering attention at the 2018 annual ICCAT meeting in November.

ICCAT scientists could not rule out that the South Atlantic Blue Shark population is overfished and experiencing overfishing, and have recommended a catch limit of ~29,000t.

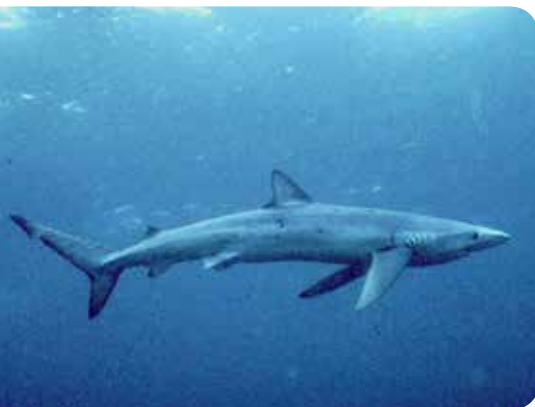
Countries reporting significant catches of Atlantic Blue Sharks include (in order of magnitude): Spain, Japan, Portugal, Chinese Taipei, Namibia, Brazil, Ghana, South Africa, Uruguay, and the Republic of Korea.

## A Weak Finning Ban

ICCAT's ban on shark finning relies on a complicated fin-to-carass ratio and is therefore difficult to enforce and exacerbates inadequacies in shark catch information. Banning the removal of shark fins at sea would ease enforcement, eliminate the wiggle-room to fin sharks, and facilitate the collection of species-specific catch data. Parties have been proposing such "fins attached" rules for ICCAT every year for a decade. Recent proposals have attracted 30 co-sponsors and backing from ~80% of attending Parties. The map below shows the overwhelming support for this best practice.



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## Call To Action

Unenforceable half-measures are simply not enough to save sharks. The Shark League urges ICCAT Parties to take the following priority actions:

- Ban retention of Mako Sharks from the North and South Atlantic

- Prioritize development of a rebuilding plan for North Atlantic Shortfin Makos
- Adopt the catch limits advised by scientists for North and South Atlantic Blue Sharks
- Actively promote and secure adoption of the ICCAT "fins attached" proposal.

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