



11 May 2020

Anders Jessen, Head of Unit
Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
European Commission
Rue Joseph II 99
1000 Brussels
Belgium

Dear Mr. Jessen:

We write with deep concern over recent remarks by various European Commission officials that undermine the scientific advice for safeguarding endangered shortfin mako sharks. The highlighting of one isolated statement from the 2019 International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) meeting is developing into a theme that weakens the EU's role in global shark conservation.

Specifically, we are troubled that the Commission is actively and publicly discounting ICCAT scientific advice to ban retention of North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks. This stance is being based on one scientist's comments during the last annual meeting review of ICCAT advice for makos, during which he offhandedly deemed associated dead discards to be "of no conservation value." The Commission appears to be using this incomplete and misleading utterance to rationalize rejection of the primary recommendation (ban retention), even though mako discard mortality has been factored into the scientific committee's advice. We have the following questions in response to this perplexing position:

- 1) How does the Commission justify elevating one out-of-context answer to intense questioning above the comprehensive, carefully worded consensus report of the entire expert committee?
- 2) Why oppose granting mako sharks the very same protective policy that the Commission has secured around the world and implemented within the EU for other threatened shark species, even those (e.g. hammerheads) with much lower chance of post-release survival?
- 3) If ICCAT adopts a mako TAC instead of a ban, what would happen once the TAC is reached?

While ICCAT action is vital for effective mako conservation, interim steps by individual Parties can help significantly and are growing more urgent each day. This is particularly true for the EU (ranked first in the world for mako landings) during the COVID-19 crisis (as fishing continues but policy meetings are postponed). As you are likely aware, Canada has recently set an example and demonstrated commitment to science-based mako recovery by applying the ICCAT advice for shortfin makos to all Atlantic fisheries.

We stress that the scientifically advised retention ban has the added, crucial benefit of flipping the incentive from irresponsible fishing practices – aimed at ensuring makos die by retrieval -- to avoidance of these sharks in the first place. This is especially important for species of such high commercial value.

We invite you to discuss these matters with our coalition via telephone or video conference call.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ali Hood
Shark Trust



Alessandro Buzzi
WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative



Àlex Bartolí
Submon



Sonja Fordham
Shark Advocates International



Shannon Arnold
Ecology Action Centre



Ian Campbell
Project AWARE

The Shark Trust is a UK charity working to safeguard the future of sharks through positive change.

Submon works to preserve marine biodiversity and reach sustainable use of the marine environment.

Ecology Action Centre promotes sustainable, ocean-based livelihoods, and marine conservation in Atlantic Canada.

Shark Advocates International is a project of The Ocean Foundation dedicated to securing science-based policies for sharks.

Project AWARE is a global movement for ocean protection powered by a community of adventurers.

WWF is working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and nature.