

ICCAT 2021 Panel 4 Intersessional Joint Statement on Mako Sharks

The Shark Trust -- with support from Shark Advocates International (a project of The Ocean Foundation), Ecology Action Centre, and PADI AWARE -- appreciates this opportunity to urge immediate protection for endangered North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks.

This year marks half a decade since the ICCAT scientists first recommended a shortfin mako retention ban to address serious overfishing in the North Atlantic. Repeated failure to heed this increasingly urgent advice jeopardizes a valuable shark species and exacerbates risk for a population collapse that is irreparable in our lifetimes. To recap:

Any landing allowances for the depleted North Atlantic population:

- Run counter to SCRS advice for a non-retention policy “*without exception*”
- Create incentive for irresponsible practices that cause stress and ensure mortality
- Further delay a multidecadal recovery.

The clear and comprehensive SCRS advice for a ban:

- Is based on TAC scenarios that incorporate all sources of mortality, including dead discards
- Is deemed the *most effective* way to achieve the substantial reductions necessary for recovery
- Takes into account the species’ relatively high post-release survival.

Retention bans (the most common shark conservation measures for ICCAT & its Parties) are:

- Straight-forward and readily enforceable
- Essential for removing incentives to encounter and kill valuable, threatened species
- Less restrictive than closing fisheries.

Rebuilding plans for slow growing sharks should incorporate a reasonably high chance of success. As suggested and/or demonstrated by the UK, US, and Norway, ICCAT mako shark measures should be based on a 70% probability of reaching targets.

The EU proposal is complicated and risky. We are deeply concerned that, five years after the SCRS advised a straight-forward, widely used approach to protect makos, the EU continues to press for an exceedingly complex suite of measures dependent on data that is not currently available or reliable (particularly levels of dead discards and post-release mortality). The proposed two fish per trip limit provides strong incentive for high-grading. This dire situation warrants a much simpler and more cautious approach.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) obligations align with a ban. EU and UK experts have found that North Atlantic mako trade (including landings from the high seas) is unsustainable and should cease. Ensuring complementary, science-based safeguards across fisheries and environment authorities is key to success.

Additional measures to minimize incidental mako mortality are needed to boost recovery but cannot replace the ban or succeed without it.

We urge Parties to immediately adopt the core of the SCRS advice for this exceptionally imperiled population (a complete retention ban) as the essential first step to stem population decline and catalyze future progress toward mako avoidance and survival.