



April 20, 2021

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Madam Secretary:

On behalf of the undersigned members of the aquarium community, we offer our congratulations on your recent confirmation and our hope for collaboration toward sustainable stewardship of our ocean resources. Specifically, we write today regarding the crisis facing one of the world's most valuable and vulnerable shark species: the shortfin mako. Our immediate request is that the Administration change course and follow scientific advice for makos in upcoming negotiations of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

Based on serious global threats from overfishing, sharks and rays were selected by Association of Zoos and Aquariums as one of 28 species programs that make up the Saving Species from Extinction (SAFE) initiative. The SAFE program will harness the unique position, access, and knowledge base of AZA institutions to support global shark and ray conservation through engagement with the research community, stakeholders and the public. A key goal is to influence conservation policy, increasing our participation in national and international policy fora, including regional fisheries bodies.

The shortfin mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) is classified as Endangered on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List and listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). ICCAT scientists have recommended a complete retention ban

for the exceptionally depleted North Atlantic population since 2017. ICCAT's failure to take this action is delaying the start of a recovery period that already spans five decades and exacerbating the risk for irreparable collapse.

The conservation community has been deeply troubled that the US – once a global leader in shark conservation -- has been a major obstacle to international protection of Atlantic makos by repeatedly opposing the limits advised by ICCAT scientists and supported by more than 15 ICCAT Parties. The next opportunity to secure an agreement is a special ICCAT intersessional meeting in July.

For the North Atlantic population, we stress that removing all incentive to catch makos is key to achieving the mortality reduction needed to turn the tide. Commercial or recreational landing allowances create incentives for irresponsible fishing practices. Retention bans, on the other hand, shift the incentive to avoidance.

The Department of Commerce has prohibited retention of roughly 20 Atlantic shark species (with some notable success). Prohibition is by far the most common measure that ICCAT has taken for sharks. ICCAT scientists have highlighted shortfin makos' 77% post release survival potential to convey that a retention ban stands a good chance of being effective at protecting this species. Some makos will unfortunately be discarded dead under any scenario. We find concern over this fact understandable but insufficient to justify rejection of the clear advice.

In summary, immediate, concerted action across the North Atlantic in the form of the simple, recommended mako retention ban is urgently needed to prevent longstanding, negative impacts for the population, ocean ecosystem, and a multitude of stakeholders. To that end, we request that you lead the US government to actively pursue ICCAT's adoption of the mako catch limits advised by scientists (as proposed by Canada and Senegal) and ensure that your staff work to secure, as a matter of priority, a binding agreement to this effect at the July ICCAT intersessional.

Thank you for your attention to the pressing needs of this remarkable shark.

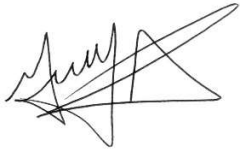
Sincerely,



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Director of Aquarium Operations
Adventure Aquarium



Dennis Pate
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Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium



Gary Siddall
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Dr. Alistair D.M. Dove
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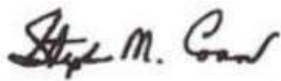
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