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Seychelles Meeting Realises Breakthrough For Shark Conservation

Mahé, Seychelles, 13 December 2007 – Sharks, so long neglected by conservationists and ruthlessly overexploited in modern fisheries, received a major boost today as governments agreed in principle to a new global agreement under the UN to protect three of the largest and most iconic shark species.

The Government of Seychelles hosted a meeting of more than 40 governments and representatives of NGOs and fisheries bodies at an intensive 3 day meeting organized by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). It had been feared that individual fisheries interests would prevent an agreement, but the Chairman of the meeting, Rolph Payet, was able to announce today that states had bridged their differences in an effort to conserve migratory whale, great white and basking sharks throughout their extensive global ranges.

The agreement, to be finalized in 2008, will promote co-operation between governments, fisheries bodies, scientists and NGOs to improve our understanding of shark species, and promote their effective conservation including controls on shark finning which has made these and other shark species such irresistible targets to meet a growing worldwide demand for fins as luxury food.

The new CMS agreement will address

- Strict conservation measures for Great white and Basking Sharks
- Engagement with the fisheries industry and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, including encouragement of shark fishing quotas, and control of by-catch
- Creation of a new global shark database
- Co-ordination of stock assessments and research
- Identification and Protection of critical shark habitats and migration routes
- Measures to build up capacity in developing countries to manage sharks
- Promotion and regulation of ecotourism and other non-consumptive use
- Encouragement of prohibition and control of shark finning

The new agreement will initially apply to the three large shark species listed by the Convention. However many delegates pointed out that other migratory shark species face serious threats especially from overfishing.

The new agreement will therefore allow other species to be added by range states with the approval of the CMS Conference of the Parties (COP). The COP is expected at its

next meeting at the end of 2008 to consider adding several other shark species to the Convention. The Sharks agreement is expected to be finalized before then at a special meeting in Germany.

Speaking today, Rolph Payet, Special Advisor to the President, said: "Although it is over two years since Seychelles along with Australia and New Zealand co-sponsored a resolution to develop a global migratory sharks conservation instrument, Seychelles is satisfied at the progress made at this first meeting and is eager to see significant progress made in 2008". He highlighted the need for UN Intergovernmental organizations such as FAO & CITES to become more involved and call upon fisheries states to urges their respective regional fisheries management bodies to play a pro-active role in the process.

The Executive Secretary of UNEP/CMS, Robert Hepworth expressed his appreciation to delegates who he said had "negotiated in an excellent spirit in order to reach consensus on the new agreement. This meeting means that we end the year of 2007 having secured international approval for eight new agreements under CMS, covering an astonishing array of endangered migratory animals – , Ruddy-headed Geese, birds of prey, sea cows, small whales, Mediterranean monk seals, grassland birds, gorillas and now sharks. The challenge now is to get these new agreements into full operation so they can change the survival prospects of all these precious species.

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