



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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PRESS RELEASE

UN wildlife conference enhances intergovernmental cooperation to safeguard sharks

Governments combat the overexploitation of sharks as their commercial value increases

Bonn/Manila, 12 February 2010 - A new landmark agreement to counteract the alarming decline of sharks has been concluded today under the auspices of the UNEP administered Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). Government representatives meeting in Manila, Philippines, agreed on the text of a Memorandum of Understanding on the conservation of migratory sharks.

At the meeting, delegates agreed to include all seven shark species in the CMS appendices under this agreement: the Great White, Basking, Whale, Porbeagle, Spiny Dogfish, Shortfin and Longfin Mako Sharks. They are to benefit from better international protection by fishing nations through reduction of threats, in particular illegal fishing and trade, by enforcing existing laws.

CMS Executive Secretary Elizabeth Maruma Mrema said: "This first global CMS instrument on commercially exploited species is a decisive step forward in international shark conservation. Wildlife Conventions, UN Agencies and international fisheries need to work together to prevent these creatures that roam the world's oceans from becoming extinct."

The goal of the CMS agreement is the restoration and long term viability of populations of migratory sharks covered by the instrument. A conservation and management plan was thoroughly discussed as a first step towards international cooperation on the protection of sharks. By signing this agreement, countries have expressed their willingness to conserve the endangered shark species covered under this agreement.

According to the IUCN Red List 2010, 17% of 1,044 shark species are threatened. At present, our knowledge of about 47% of shark species is too limited to even assess if they are threatened.

Over-fishing, fisheries by-catch, illegal trade, habitat destruction, depletion of prey species, pollution with a high risk of mercury intoxication, boat strikes and the impact of climate change on the marine environment seriously threaten sharks. Sharks have slow growth with a gestation period of up to 22 months. They might reach maturity only after 20 years and produce relatively few young. Being top predators, their natural mortality is low. Sharks have high life-expectancy: Whales Sharks can live up to 100 years. Some shark species are highly migratory, which makes it difficult to protect the species and its habitat across a global range. These biological characteristics make sharks particularly vulnerable with little chance to recover if overfished.

Some species such as Mako Sharks are targeted for sports fishing, trophy hunting, and as cure in traditional medicine. According to the IUCN Red List of the World Conservation Union, 14 shark species are "critically endangered" and face an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

Sharks suffer from overexploitation as both target and non target catch. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), up to 900,000 metric tons of sharks have been caught every year

for the last two decades. However, taking into account illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and missing data, the catch figure is expected to be at least twice as high.

Since the late 1980s Whale Shark meat has been increasingly considered as a high-grade product and gained acceptance by consumers as an exotic food, and prices began to skyrocket. TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, reported 2000 kg of Whale Shark meat sold in Taiwan for USD 7,000 (€ 4,500).

Total catches in global shark fisheries are still increasing, while some populations have already crashed. Studies reveal that shark populations collapsed in the Northwest Atlantic by 75% within 15 years, and both in the Gulf of Mexico and in the Mediterranean Sea by 90%. Valuable fish and crustacean fisheries such as high sea long-line and driftnet fleets that target tuna, sword fish, sail fish and marlin claim an unsustainably high death toll on sharks.

Although a shark finning ban was adopted as of mid 2007 by 19 countries, the European Union and 9 Regional Fisheries Management Organizations for fishing vessels in their waters, sharks continue to be hunted. High demand and price of shark fins have triggered increased hunting activities. While the finless bodies are dumped into the sea, fins can be easily stored on board of fishing vessels without competing for storage space with more valuable fish species. This gives a considerable incentive for finning and exacerbates the problem of overexploitation.

A growing number of commercially exploited sharks have been listed on the appendices of CMS and CITES. The Spiny Dogfish and the Porbeagle Shark are being proposed by governments for inclusion on CITES Appendix II to avoid overexploitation by imposing controls in trade.

Short and long-finned Mako Sharks, the Porbeagle Shark and the Spiny Dogfish continue to be seriously threatened by over-fishing despite their indispensable role in the oceans' ecosystems. Their listing on CMS Appendix II encourages range states to conclude international agreements.

The first global instrument on sharks is expected to complement existing international wildlife conservation agreements, fisheries agreements and regional fisheries management organizations. CMS Appendix I lists migratory sharks that are threatened with extinction. Member states to the Convention shall prohibit their hunting, fishing and deliberate killing and implement comprehensive conservation activities. In the view of overall declining marine biodiversity and overfishing of top predators in particular, the CMS Sharks agreement renews efforts during the International Year of Biodiversity to counteract the global loss of biodiversity.

Notes to Editors:

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, also known as the Bonn Convention works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through the negotiation and implementation of agreements and species action plans. With currently 113 member countries, many of them in Africa, CMS is a fast-growing convention with special importance due to its expertise in the field of migratory species.

The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries aims to facilitate long term sustainable use of the world's fish stocks. The FAO International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA) is based on this Code of Conduct. The IPOA-Sharks is a voluntary international instrument for nations to take action to ensure the conservation and management of sharks and their long-term sustainable use by developing and implementing complementary National Plans of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (NPOA-sharks). UN General Assembly resolutions 59/25, 61/105 and 62/177 concern the implementation of the IPOA-Sharks.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides a framework for the conservation and management of fisheries. Coastal States have the obligation to ensure fish stocks occurring within 200 nautical miles away from the coast.

The UN Fish Stocks Agreement elaborates upon provisions of UNCLOS and aims to greatly improve the international management of fishing on the high seas. Its purpose is to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks through global, regional and sub-regional fisheries management organizations.

The Barcelona Convention is to prevent and reduce pollution from ships, aircraft and land based sources in the Mediterranean Sea. Together with its protocols and the Mediterranean Action Plan, form part of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme.

Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) are responsible for managing fish stocks on high seas and those which migrate through the waters of more than just a single State. However, no RFMO is dedicated explicitly to the conservation and management of sharks.

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