

United Kingdom Voluntary National Report on Shark Conservation, 2012

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1. Introduction

1.1 The UK continues to be a leading voice for sustainable fisheries, trade and protection of endangered shark species. We do not oppose the capture of sharks in commercial fisheries, but want to ensure that those fisheries are sustainable at all times, and that any endangered species are properly protected. This means basing management on sound science, acting long before populations collapse and providing special protection for endangered shark species at national, EU and international levels.

2. Domestic initiatives on shark conservation

2.1 ***The UK Shark, Skate and Ray Conservation Plan*¹** is a key document in response to the FAO/EU Shark Plans of Action, outlining how the UK will work nationally and internationally to manage and protect shark species. The document recognises the important role of elasmobranchs in the ecosystem and highlights the pressures facing them. It summarises current management and conservation measures to protect sharks, skates and rays and sets out our policy objectives with the overarching aim of managing elasmobranch stocks sustainably so that depleted stocks recover and that those faring better are fished sustainably.

2.2 ***The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)*** is an important piece of UK legislation which consolidates a range of conservation commitments in England and Wales, including the Bern Convention and the EC Habitats Directive. Listing of a species under the Act makes it an offence (subject to exceptions) to intentionally kill, injure, take, possess, or trade in that animal in English and Welsh Waters. The Angel Shark is already listed in the Act due to its adverse conservation status. Commercial fishers are already prohibited from landing this species under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), however listing under the Act extends this prohibition to recreational activities out to 12nm. The Basking Shark is also listed, as its population is thought to be much depleted and targeted fisheries have been prohibited for a number of years. These listings are in line with ICES advice that these species should receive the highest possible protection.

2.3 Additional species can be added to the Act as part of a five yearly review, whereby the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), adviser to the United Kingdom Government on nature conservation issues, proposes species in need of protection. Through this process we will consider the listing of additional shark

1. <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/documents/interim2/shark-conservation-plan.pdf>

species on the Act (Dec 2013), where these listings would be in line with scientific advice and offer a real conservation benefit.

2.4 In Scotland, the ***Nature Conservation Act (Scotland) 2004*** reformed the 1981 Act to offer similar protection for wildlife species in Scotland. In particular, it extends the protection offered to Basking Sharks by strengthening the offence provision in relation to this species.

2.5 ***Tope (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 2008***. Following reports of plans for a commercial tope fishing operation, measures were introduced to protect tope, a vulnerable European continental-shelf and coastal shark species. The Tope Order prohibits fishing for tope other than by rod and line, and sets a 45kg per day tope by-catch limit in commercial fisheries for other species. Tope landed by commercial vessels must have their head and fins still attached. Rod and line anglers fishing from boats are not allowed to land their catches ashore alive or dead. In this way both commercial and recreational fishermen share responsibility for the conservation of tope.

2.6 More recently, the Scottish Government introduced the ***Sharks, Skates and Rays (Prohibition of Fishing, Transshipment and Landing) (Scotland) (Order) 2012***. Like the UK Tope Order, the Scottish Order provides protection for Tope from both commercial and recreational fishermen. The Scottish Order also identifies a further 21 species of elasmobranch which are currently protected from commercial fishing at EU level, and extends this protection to prevent landing by the recreational sector in Scottish waters. Recreational fishermen are still permitted to fish using the 'catch and release' method, meaning that the valuable tagging programmes run by anglers can continue.

2.7 The UK provided funding this year to the [Shark Trust](#) to produce a series of 'Fisheries Advisory' leaflets which provide information for fishermen on prohibited/protected species.

2.8 We are also currently considering the effectiveness and value of existing legislation and continue to seek ways of improving species protection without the need to regulate, for example, by inducing behavioural change, codes of conduct for commercial fishers and recreational anglers. We are funding collaborative research through [Cefas](#) with the fishing industry in order to establish the status of shark species such as porbeagle and spurdog and to find better ways to protect them.

3. UK involvement at EU level

3.1 The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) provides the framework for the protection and management of commercial fish species, including some sharks, within EU waters. Several species such as the basking, white, and porbeagle shark are considered prohibited species whilst others such as spurdog and deep sea sharks have zero Total Allowable Catches (TACs).

3.2 The EU finning ban Council Regulation (EC) No 1185/2003) prohibits the removal of shark fins at sea. A tightening of the regulation has been proposed to remove a derogation which allows for fins to be removed in exceptional cases i.e. freezer vessels. This is currently being discussed by the European Parliament. The UK

Government has already taken steps to go further than the regulation requires by requiring all sharks be landed with their 'fins naturally attached' to ensure shark finning cannot take place on UK registered vessels.

- 3.3 Under OSPAR (The Convention for the Protection of the marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic) the UK engages in regional Seas Conventions to ensure greater protection of sharks is afforded.

4. UK involvement in international fora

- 4.1 The UK engages actively in international fora where we feel the most benefit will arise for the conservation and management of sharks. In particular within the RFMOs (Regional Fisheries Management Organisations), CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), and the CMS (Convention on Migratory Species) Shark MoU.

- 4.2 **Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs).** Much has been achieved to date in the RFMOs, especially within the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). Recent successes include the banning of finning, the requirement to record catches to species level, and the prohibiting of the landing, sale, transshipment, etc of several species of shark including Thresher and Hammerhead.

- 4.3 **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).** The UK views CITES as an important means of regulating trade. We see it as complimenting current fisheries controls rather than in place of them. It also provides crucial data on the utilisation of species of commercial interest and supports their sustainable use. The UK will continue to support all shark listing proposals which put across a scientifically robust case.

- 4.4 **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Shark MoU.** The UK sees the CMS Shark MoU as an important forum for working with other likeminded countries to improve global conservation and management of sharks and develop shared understandings and objectives to take into other important fora such as CITES. The UK signed the Shark MoU in June 2012 (also on behalf of a number of our Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies).

- 4.5 The UK is a co-proponent of a proposed Declaration to be presented at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in South Korea in September 2012. It calls for action to be taken by States to improve the management and conservation of threatened and endangered sharks, in particular within RFMOs.