

## **Sharks MOS4**

### **4th Meeting of the Signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks**

**28 February – 2 March 2023**

#### **OPENING REMARKS**

**by**

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Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am delighted to welcome you all to Bonn for this 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks. I'd like to give a special welcome to the Ambassador of Cote d'Ivoire. Bienvenue.

The UN Campus in Bonn is the home of the Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species and many of its specialized agreements and MOUs, including the Sharks MOU.

CMS is the only legally binding global agreement that addresses the conservation and sustainable use of migratory species. Its central objective is to bring countries together to find solutions to shared conservation challenges around these unique species.

The Sharks MOU is an excellent example of an effective specialized instrument developed under the Convention, specifically designed to try to improve the conservation of a group of species.

Established in 2010, the Sharks MOU is the only global framework for shark conservation. It is still relatively young and is still growing – currently with 49 Signatories and 16 Cooperating Partners. I would like

to strongly encourage other countries to join as Signatories if they have reason to do so as range states.

Since it was established, the Sharks MOU has been at the forefront of global action to improve the conservation status of 37 different migratory shark species, from the whale shark to mobulid rays to Hammerheads, from largely-protected species to commercially exploited species.

It is truly unique in how it coordinates conservation initiatives as well as strengthened efforts by countries that exercise jurisdiction over the migratory range of listed shark populations. It also includes countries whose flag vessels are engaged outside national jurisdictional limits in activities that may affect these populations. The MOU has also established a solid science-base through its strong and dedicated Advisory Committee and through the effective partnerships it has built with the IUCN Sharks Specialist Group and other Cooperating Partners over the years. - I would like to thank the members of this committee for their work.

Now, unfortunately, as I am sure you know, we have a great deal of work ahead of us. Sharks and rays are facing an unprecedented crisis. And when you look at the status of migratory species, the ones that are in most trouble in terms of taxonomic groups are sharks and rays by far. According to the latest IUCN Red List assessment, more than one-third of sharks and rays are threatened with extinction. In fact, it is estimated that the global abundance of oceanic sharks and rays has declined by over 70 per cent in the last 50 years.

CMS is in the process of preparing the first-ever State of Migratory Species report, which we will be delivering at our COP14 this October in Uzbekistan – and I hope we will see many of you there. We will be looking at all migratory species, not only those on Appendix I and II of the Convention, from available data. We did a deep look at Appendix II species – which are those that can be legally taken and where many

sharks and rays are listed, to determine whether they might benefit from additional conservation measures. 100 % of the sharks and rays listed on Appendix II were found to be of high or very high priority for needing additional attention and action for conservation. The graph for this is quite striking when one looks at the colour scheme and all the shades of red and orange for sharks and rays, much more than the other taxa groups.

We also know, that overfishing is clearly the main threat to these species, - whether it is illegal or unsustainable intentional takes or unintentional bycatch. We have been talking about this situation for a very long time and we need to turn the corner on this – and this is the group to do this. I really hope to see the results of good discussions about what we can do, including to raise awareness globally about the situation – down to the technical level of how we can turn this around.

While there are many important issues on the agenda of this meeting, one interesting topic is the “ISRA Initiative” – the IUCN SSC SSG-led initiative to identify Important Shark and Ray Areas for the species listed under the MOU.

ISRA is a tool through which one can identify critical areas for listed shark species and make recommendations for targeted conservation actions related to these areas. And it comes at an opportune time, as it could be used to help deliver on the 30 by 30 target adopted in the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Another topic of interest is the proposal to list the tope shark on Annex 1, a critically endangered species. There are many other policy and technical topics that are all aimed at improving the conservation status of sharks covered by the MOU.

I want to draw your attention to a particularly important agenda item: the budget. The Sharks MOU Secretariat is comprised of a single staff person, who has done an extraordinary job in supporting the many streams of work of this MOU, not least of which includes the

organization of this meeting and preparation of the many high-quality documents before you. However, the P2 level of this position must be upgraded, in keeping with UN practices, as well as the conclusions of an independent consultant who did a review of positions within the CMS Family. We have included this adjustment in the budget, which I call on you to please support.

In addition, the budget for the Sharks MOU is funded by purely voluntary contributions, which have been generously provided by only a very few signatories. This is a very challenging way to run the Secretariat and I would urge every single Signatory to provide financial contributions for the work of the Secretariat. This is what we do in the CMS Secretariat. Even if they are small, those contributions make a huge difference. We use a little bit of money, and we make it go far – I promise you – including my time and Melanie's time, which is not in your budget. I would also like you to consider how you could help to put the Secretariat on a firmer footing, to ensure that we don't have to worry every day whether or not we have the funding.

I would finally like to sincerely thank the Signatories who have contributed funds as well as those that have provided other support to both the operation and implementation of the Sharks MOU over the past three years as well as the many volunteers who have contributed their time and expertise to this MoU.

Finally, I would like to thank our depositary, the government of Germany, and the German Environment Ministry - **BMUV** for providing the Interpreters for MOS4 as well as the kind invitation for the dinner reception this evening.

Before closing, I would like to give my sincere thanks to the Secretariat team for the excellent way in which this meeting has been organized. In particular, I would like to give special thanks to Andrea Pauly, the heart of the Sharks MOU Secretariat who has worked for months to get

us to this point, Melanie Virtue, for her leadership and guidance, and also all of our wonderful conference services team.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you – for your dedication and commitment to the Sharks MoU and for making the journey to Bonn – despite the travel challenges - to be part of this meeting.

I look forward to hearing the outcomes of your deliberations. I invite discussions on the margins and am here across the way in the tall building if we have a chance to have some chats. I really look forward to the results of this meeting and wish everyone a very productive and wonderful meeting.

Thank you so much.