



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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PRESS RELEASE

New Conservation Boost for Sharks in the Middle East and North Africa

Dubai, 17 February 2014 - Efforts to conserve migratory sharks have been strengthened at an international workshop on shark conservation supported by the UN. Government representatives from nine countries have gathered in Dubai to lend more support to shark conservation in the region.

At the conference, nine countries in the Arab region signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks concluded under the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) reinforcing its mandate to expand its work on migratory sharks. The signing took place in Dubai on the sidelines of a joint training workshop on shark conservation, organized by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) in collaboration with the UAE Ministry of Environment and Water.

CMS Executive Secretary Bradnee Chambers said: "We welcome the commitment of the new signatories that will help catalyse regional initiatives to reduce threats to migratory sharks."

The coasts of countries United Arab Emirates, Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Mauritania, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen are home to numerous shark species, some of which are also listed under the Sharks MOU, such as the world's largest fish, the whale shark, the fasted swimming shark, the shortfin mako shark and the great white shark. These countries' national waters are vital to many shark species as feeding and breeding areas. Whale sharks congregate in the Arab Seas and Indian Ocean, which underlines the importance of the area for this plankton eating giant.

Since migratory sharks cross the high seas and national waters of different states, closer collaboration between countries is needed to tackle over-fishing and other threats. Sharks are under serious threat around the globe and suffer from overexploitation as both target and non-target catch.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization, up to 900,000 metric tons of sharks have been caught every year for the last two decades. An estimated 70 million sharks are killed every year to support the global shark fin market. However, taking into account illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and missing data from some major fisheries nations the catch figure is thought to be at least twice as high.

Most sharks are long-living species that grow slowly, mature late, and produce few young. These biological factors make sharks particularly vulnerable to overfishing and mean that populations can be slow to recover once depleted.

The CMS Sharks MOU concluded in 2010 is the first intergovernmental treaty dedicated to migratory sharks at a global level and complements a suite of existing wildlife and fisheries agreements. With the addition of the nine countries the number of signatories now stands at 36.

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