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PROPOSAL FOR A CONCERTED ACTION FOR THE BLUE SHARK (*Prionace glauca*) ALREADY LISTED ON APPENDIX II OF THE CONVENTION*

Summary:

Marine Research and Conservation Foundation (MARECO) has submitted the attached proposal* for a continuation of the Concerted Action for the blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) in accordance with the process elaborated in Resolution 12.28 (Rev. COP14).

*The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CMS Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.

PROPOSAL FOR A CONCERTED ACTION FOR THE BLUE SHARK (Prionace glauca) ALREADY LISTED ON APPENDIX II OF THE CONVENTION

Proponent(s)

Marine Research and Conservation Foundation (MARECO)

Target species, lower taxon or population, or group of taxa with needs in common

Class: Chondrichthyes

Subclass: Elasmobranchii

Order: Carcharhiniformes

Family: Carcharhinidae

Genus: *Prionace*

Species: *Prionace glauca*

Listed on CMS Appendix II.

Geographical range

Blue sharks are among the most widely distributed of all pelagic shark species, occurring in tropical and temperate waters across all major ocean basins. Typically, blue sharks inhabit water temperatures of 12-18 °C but can tolerate a temperature range of 10-30 °C, from the surface to depths exceeding 1,100 m (Ebert et al. 2021).

Their widespread range, alongside extensive seasonal and vertical migrations are driven by prey availability, thermal fronts and reproductive cycles (Howey et al. 2017). On a global scale, the population shows little to no genetic variation due to extensive migratory connectivity (Bailleul et al. 2018; Verissimo et al. 2017), however two genetic clusters have been identified in the northern Atlantic/Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific (Nikolic et al. 2023).

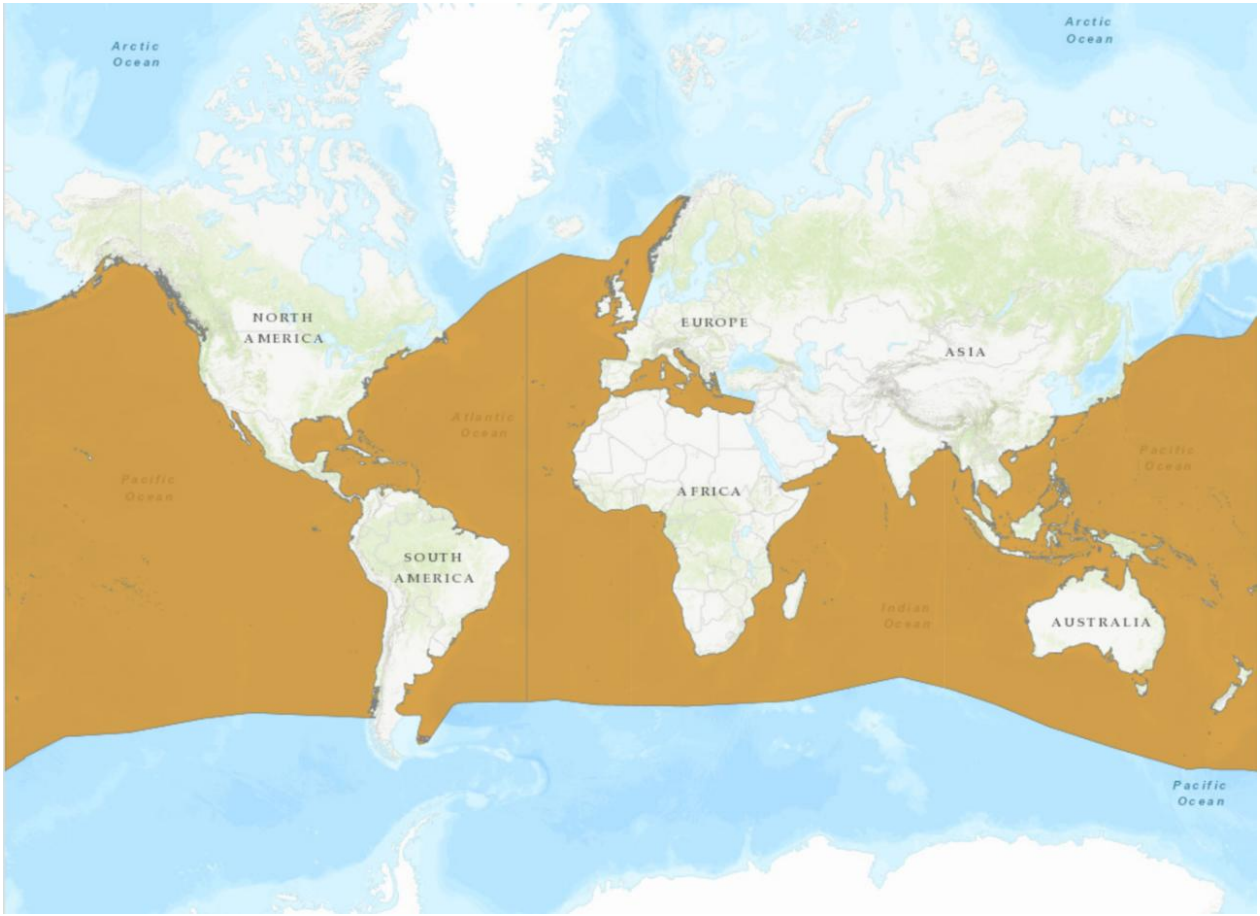

Figure 1: Geographic range of the blue shark (© IUCN Red List).

Summary of activities

This CA proposes to continue working on activities adopted for the blue shark at COP14:

1. Encourage Parties to continue engaging with other MEAs, RFBs, and other
   a. relevant entities to enhance blue shark management including the development of
   b. the IUCN SSC SSG Conservation Strategy and Action Plan for Pelagic Sharks and
   c. Rays, in cooperation with the Sharks MOU;

2. Develop international guidelines from countries with established blue shark tourism
   a. (e.g. Azores, UK, South Africa);

3. Support the assessment into the impacts of fisheries on blue shark interactions
   a. (fisheries-induced mortality, discards to design mitigation strategies and support
   b. the assessment of post-release mortality of blue sharks across regions,
   c. demographics and fishing gears);

4. Support the identification of sub-population and genetic differences (to support regional TACs through fisheries-independent data);

5. Identify inconsistencies in the level of protection ensured by different Party Range States;

6. Identify critical habitats and understand the connectivity and migrations;

7. Support assessments into the impacts of climate change on blue sharks by stock or region.

Associated benefits

The continued implementation of this Concerted Action will deliver wide-ranging benefits, not only for blue sharks, but other CMS-listed migratory species that occupy the same range and face comparable anthropogenic pressures. Enhanced coordination under CMS promotes the dissemination of data on shark distribution, fisheries interactions and post-release mortality, improving evidence-based management decisions across Party Range States.

By aligning with the Conservation Strategy and Action Plan for Pelagic Sharks and Rays in development by the Shark Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission (IUCN SSC SSG) and drawing insights from the IUCN Green Status assessment for the blue shark, this initiative will strengthen global recovery planning and allow future tracking of conservation progress (Polo-Silva et al. 2025). Signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (Sharks MOU) welcomed this initiative and agreed to support the approach outlined in CMS/Sharks/MOS4/Doc 10.2/Rev.1.

As one of the most broadly distributed species of shark, any recommendations to enhance the conservation outlook for blue sharks, will likely have positive implications for other threatened and CMS-listed species that have the same range and are caught by the same fisheries and fishing gears e.g. mako, thresher and hammerhead sharks. The Concerted Action will further contribute to capacity building and raising awareness among CMS Parties and non-Party Range States, fostering best practices in management and sustainable tourism. Continued engagement through the Sharks MOU and collaboration with RFMOs will ensure that advances made under this initiative contribute to long-term, ecosystem-based management of migratory species.

Collectively, these outcomes will provide a replicable model for other migratory shark species and help CMS Parties meet their obligations under the Convention through effective, science-driven cooperation. The Annex provides a source of actions that Parties could, where relevant, follow and adopt for the successful management of the blue shark (see NDF Step 6 in Mundy-Taylor et al. 2014). The Annex is not exhaustive and could be used as a mould for shaping a species conservation action plan if necessary.

Timeframe

Please refer to the Annex 1 for an overview.

Relationship to other CMS actions

This CA would significantly contribute to the implementation of the following mandates established under CMS and the Sharks MOU:

- Resolution 12.22 and Decisions 13.62 to 13.63 on Bycatch
- Resolution 13.3 and Decisions 13.71 to 13.73 on Chondrichthyan Species
- Decisions 13.66 to 13.68 on Marine Wildlife Watching
- Sharks MOU Programme of Work 2023-2025: Development of a global strategy and regional action plans for pelagic sharks

Conservation priority

Blue sharks remain one of the most heavily exploited shark species worldwide and continues to face significant conservation and management challenges across its global range. It is estimated that around 10 million blue sharks are caught annually, often within multi-species fisheries (Poseidon, 2022). These intensive fisheries also take a bycatch of other, seriously depleted pelagic sharks listed in the CMS Appendices (Pacoreau et al. 2021), whose recovery is also dependent upon conservation action for blue shark (IUCN Green Status, Polo-Silva et al. 2025).

In the Mediterranean, blue shark populations are assessed as Critically Endangered, with declines of ~78-90% over three generations (Sims et al. 2016). Atlantic stocks are believed to be at second greatest risk globally, with spatial overlaps of close to 80% with longline fisheries (Queiroz et al. 2019), and a median population change for the blue sharks in the North Atlantic over three generations of -53.9% in 2018 (Rigby et al. 2019). Although a total allowable catch (TAC) has been adopted in ICCAT, allocations to fishing States have not yet been implemented in the form of quotas, and similar management frameworks remain limited or inconsistent across other ocean basins. The Indian Ocean population continues to decline (Rigby et al. 2019), while trends in the Pacific Ocean are comparatively stable but uncertain (Li et al. 2020; WCPFC stock assessments, 2022).

The recent IUCN Green Status Assessment for the blue shark (Polo-Silva et al. 2025) identified a recovery score of 43% (Largely Depleted) due to its Threatened or Near Threatened Status in four of the six spatial units within its global range. This underscores the urgent need for coordinated recovery actions to strengthen management at regional and global scales.

Relevance

CMS provides a global platform for the conservation of migratory animals and their habitats, aiming to ensure that their use does not exceed sustainable levels. The blue shark is one of the most (if not the most) migratory species of shark, which necessitates enhanced conservation action. This CA will contribute significantly by: (i) strengthening the political will to implement conservation measures in a coordinated and timely fashion; (ii) bridging migratory shark fisheries and conservation interests; and (iii) contributing to the implementation of the FAO's IPOA-Sharks for the world's most heavily fished shark.

Absence of better remedies

Only few t-RFMOs have adopted management measures for this species and the mandate of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) is narrowly focused on ensuring that international trade does not endanger the species further. Therefore, the Concerted Action proposed here provides an important avenue for addressing the threats to and lack of cooperative management for this species and for promoting further research and conservation.

Readiness and feasibility

There are engaged NGOs, experts, and community organizations ready to support Range States to develop, fund and implement collaborative work. Recent initiatives at other international fora, shows that expert networks exist that could support Range States with the implementation of the proposed activities. Furthermore, support will be appreciated from the Sharks MOU and Cooperating Partners, to support the development and implementation of the action plans.

Likelihood of success

Supported by engaged NGOs, experts and organisations, and these Concerted Actions, it is bound for success. Moreover, the alignment of some of the Concerted Actions herein with the Conservation Strategy and Action Plans for Pelagic Sharks and Rays under the Sharks MOU, means that there is already active engagement of stakeholders. No risk factors were identified that have the potential to significantly jeopardize the success of the proposed activities.

Magnitude of likely impact

It is anticipated that these Concerted Actions can improve the management of blue shark practices, with a greater degree of protection for the species across its geographic range by ensuring all CMS Parties are engaged in these activities. Simultaneously, it can pave the way for greater consideration of blue shark conservation in the high seas by working together with RMFOs. Tourism is a fast-growing industry (e.g. UK, Mexico) and blue sharks are becoming increasingly popular. It is expected that the demand for blue shark tourism will rise globally, becoming both a threat and an opportunity. If well managed, this economic activity can assist in the management of the species, help raise awareness and facilitate research. CMS can provide effective guidelines to ensure this practice is sustainable and equitable, with a model replicable to other species.

Cost-effectiveness

This CA is of particular importance given that the Sharks MOU Signatories have not yet listed the blue shark in Annex 1 of the MOU. One of the key components of the Concerted Actions is to encourage cooperation between Parties, information and knowledge exchange, and the development of effective strategies. If conservation successes can be replicated and best practices (such as tourism guidelines) established, this collaboration will prove vastly more cost-effective than individual countries forging their own path separately.

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Consultations planned / undertaken

Following the initial Concerted Action, adopted during COP14 (UNEP/CMS/Concerted Action 14.6), activities got under way. Consultations with experts are still ongoing to inform on the specific activities and outcomes described below. The timeframe for implementation of CA is short, and as such, all activities are proposed for extension/renewal under this new CA proposal.

Annex: Activities and expected outcomes

Activity		Outputs/Outcomes	Timeframe	Responsibility	Funding
Management					
1.	Encourage Parties to continue engaging with other MEAs, RFBs, and other relevant entities to enhance blue shark management including the development of the IUCN SSC SSG Conservation Strategy and Action Plan for Pelagic Sharks and Rays, in cooperation with the Sharks MOU.	Heightened attention to blue shark conservation needs.	2026-2029	NGOs, experts	NA
Sustainable Tourism					
2.	Develop international guidelines from countries with established blue shark tourism (e.g. Azores, UK, South Africa).	Protocols for responsible blue shark tourism interaction established.	2026-2029	NGOs, experts	Garfield Weston Foundation/ MARECO
Research					
3.	Support the assessment into the impacts of fisheries on blue shark interactions (fisheries-induced mortality, discards to design mitigation strategies and support the assessment of post-release mortality of blue sharks across regions, demographics and fishing gears)	— Interactions incidence and mortality rates determined; — Proposals to reduce risk of interactions of blue sharks produced; — Effects of fisheries interaction on blue shark populations assessed; — Post-release survival for blue sharks determined.	2026-2029	CMS Parties (and non-Party Range States)	NA
4.	Support the identification of sub-population and genetic differences (to support regional TACs through fisheries-independent data)	Sub-populations identified.	2027	CMS Parties (and non-Party Range States)	Shark Foundation/ MARECO
5.	Identify inconsistencies in the level of protection ensured by different Party Range States.	Protection gap analysis undertaken.	2028	NGOs	Law of the Wild/MARECO

Activity		Outputs/Outcomes	Timeframe	Responsibility	Funding
6.	Identify critical habitats and understand the connectivity and migrations.	— Critical areas identified; — Migratory routes identified; — Priority areas for conservation (PAC) identified; — ISRAS E-Atlas/other GIS output of critical habitats.	2026-2029	NGOs/Research groups/IUCN SSG ISRA	NA
7.	Support assessments into the impacts of climate change on blue sharks by stock or region.	Vulnerability and impacts of climate change on blue shark populations better understood.	2029	NGOs/Research groups	NA