



Project AWARE®

Cooperating Partner to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (MOS)

CMS Sharks MOU Partnership Activities Update Report 2016 - 2018

Project AWARE® is a global movement for ocean protection powered by a community of adventurers and an international non-profit organization with registered charity offices in the US, UK and Australia.

With a mission to connect the passion for ocean adventure with the purpose of marine conservation, Project AWARE brings together a dedicated team of individuals around the world who share a passion for ocean protection and adventure to secure real and direct environmental victories.

Project AWARE works with various shark conservation partners to use the power of international conservation agreements and management regulations for change and calls for national, regional and global science-based, species-specific conservation actions that heed all available scientific advice for limiting shark and ray catches, protect endangered species, and completely ban the removal of shark fins at sea.

Project AWARE brings an extensive network for communications and citizen action, including the voice of a global constituency of 1.2 million scuba divers which it has successfully galvanized in targeted citizen advocacy related to shark and ray conservation at national, regional and international levels in the past decade.

Project AWARE advocates for the implementation and enforcement of international protections for migratory shark and rays under the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the CMS Sharks Memorandum of Understanding (CMS Sharks MoU).

Background:

Project AWARE has been involved in CMS efforts since 2011 bringing the global scuba divers' voice for shark and ray protections to the CMS forum.

- In 2011, Project AWARE actively supported a proposal to list the globally threatened giant manta ray under CMS Appendices.
- In 2014, Project AWARE developed a *Sharks and Rays Without Borders* campaign to raise awareness while working with partner NGOs and governments to help

secure the listings of additional 22 shark and ray species under CMS. Project AWARE delivered 28,804 letters from its supporters to decision-makers urging collaboration on the conservation of the proposed species. Project AWARE represented the voice of the dive community and worked with partner NGOs to urge CMS Parties to commit to regional protections for the proposed shark and ray species.

- In 2016, Project AWARE entered into a partnership agreement with the CMS and became a Cooperating Partner to the CMS Sharks MoU. We urged Signatories to take immediate, concrete action that can go a long way towards fulfilling CMS obligations for listed species, as well as broader commitments to cooperate toward better protection for these vulnerable animals. Project AWARE contributed to the CMS Sharks MOU workshop held in Bristol, UK.
- In 2017, at the CMS CoP12 in the Philippines, Project AWARE joined a side event “*Making CMS Work for Sharks: Spotlight on Mako Sharks*” to highlight the immediate opportunities to end uncontrolled fishing of these CMS listed species in the North Atlantic, and encourage the 125 CMS Parties to fulfill their obligations for listed shark and ray species through prioritization, education, advocacy, and capacity building.

Here we report on Project AWARE’s activities supporting the implementation of the 2016-2018 CMS Sharks MOU Program of Work adopted in February 2016 and assisting with the following objectives:

Objective A: Improving understanding of migratory shark populations through research, monitoring and information exchange

Activities:

2. Information Exchange

2.6 Disseminate traditional knowledge on sharks and their habitats.

Through its global network of over 1 million scuba divers and ocean advocates, and its diverse means of communications, Project AWARE disseminates information about key threats to migratory shark and rays species to a wide audience with a focus on distilling complex policy or environmental issues to propel community action on a global scale.

Since 2016, through a network of over 1,000 AWARE Shark Conservation Specialty Instructors, Project AWARE has educated 2,335 dive students around the globe about the plight of sharks and rays. The specialty course highlights the unique physical attributes of sharks, their conservation status, what makes them vulnerable, their importance to marine ecosystems, major threats contributing to their decline, key management strategies that can protect them, their value to local economies, and ways to remove common misperceptions that are a barrier to conservation.

With an annual average audience of over 350K web users, Project AWARE’s website

exposes a large audience to general information about sharks and their habitats as well as information on key international conservation agreements and management regulations including the role and importance of the [CMS Sharks MoU](#).

Objective B: Ensuring that directed and non-directed fisheries for sharks are sustainable – In pursuing activities described under this objective Signatories should endeavor to cooperate through RFMOs, the FAO, RSCAPs and biodiversity-related MEAs as appropriate

Activities:

4. Ecologically sustainable management of shark populations, including monitoring, control and surveillance

4.5 Encourage relevant bodies to set targets for fish quotas, fishing effort and other restrictions to help achieve sustainable use in line with the best available scientific advice and using the precautionary approach to ensure that all shark catch is within sustainable limits.

Working for the past two years under the coalition umbrella of the [Shark League](#) for the Atlantic and Mediterranean, Project AWARE has effectively collaborated with elasmobranch-focused experts - namely Shark Advocates International, Shark Trust, and Ecology Action - to prevent overexploitation of Atlantic and Mediterranean elasmobranchs through improved fisheries management. Specifically, the Shark League is working to secure through Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) and follow-up national actions, shark and ray catch limits that align with scientific advice, strict protections for endangered species, and strong enforceable bans on shark finning. Shark League's efforts focuses on ICCAT, GFCM and NAFO. Project AWARE contributes to the Shark League's work through participation at relevant stakeholder meetings, targeted advocacy, and communications and outreach.

Among many other activities, securing science-based conservation measures for shortfin mako sharks has been one of the Shark League's top priority given the warnings and advice from ICCAT scientists. The Shark League has also been working towards securing measures for elasmobranchs under NAFO to improve catch reporting and minimize incidental mortality, fishing limits based on science and the precautionary approach, and protections for especially vulnerable species specifically Thorny Skates and Greenland Sharks.

Over the past 2 years, the Shark League has led significant elasmobranch conservation advances by multiple RFMOs and individual Parties. Specific to ICCAT, member groups have played significant roles in the development and publicization of:

- clear scientific advice for shortfin mako and blue sharks including catch levels;
- the first tonnage-specific measure for shark landings (North Atlantic blue sharks);
- a binding measure aimed at ending North Atlantic shortfin mako overfishing; and
- resulting fisheries management improvements in the US, Canada, and EU.

4.8 Encourage no increase in and minimize the use of plastics and non-degradable materials in fishing operations.

Project AWARE has been an active member of the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) since its inception in 2015 - an alliance that brings together stakeholders from a variety of sectors including fishing industry, the private sector, academia, governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and is dedicated to tackling the problem of ghost fishing gear at a global scale. Through Project AWARE's global marine debris survey, Dive Against Debris®, citizen scuba divers are empowered in the removal and reporting of marine debris items encountered at dive sites across the globe. Critical quantitative evidence is yielded regarding the types and quantities of marine debris items found underwater on the seafloor, including abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG). Additionally, information concerning the impacts marine debris has on marine life is captured including entanglement, injury and death. Debris-free sites are also recorded. ALDFG accounts for over 20% of all debris items removed and reported through Dive Against Debris including over 10,000 discarded fishing nets.

Through the GGGI's Building Evidence Working Group, Project AWARE has contributed the global Dive Against Debris dataset supporting the development of the centralized global ghost gear database. This data has helped inform where ALDFG has and has not been recorded at various dive sites across the globe. The geographic scope and diversity of the Dive Against Debris dataset provides unique insights to the global ghost gear issue. Additionally, the data generated through Dive Against Debris provides one of just a few sources of absence data to inform where ghost gear has not been found. This is an essential component for identifying true ghost gear hotspots where management efforts should be prioritized.

In 2017, the Global Ghost Gear Initiative launched the Best Practice Framework For Fishing Gear Management - a collaborative resource developed by GGGI members in association with Poseidon Aquatic Resource Management Ltd.

6. Cooperation through RFMOs, RSCAPs and FAO

6.1 Encourage implementation of conservation and management measures adopted by RFMOs, RSCAPs, biodiversity-related MEAs and FAO.

Together with Shark League partners, Project AWARE has supported work led by the Shark Trust towards achieving significant progress for the implementation of management measures for Mediterranean elasmobranch conservation. Actions taken over the past two years includes increasing attention to Parties' compliance with respect to GFCM/36:2012/3, including a GFCM requirement for reporting on national implementation, and a new FAO species identification guide that flags GFCM-listed elasmobranchs. Progress has also been made through a proposal from the EU to facilitate improved enforcement of the GFCM shark finning ban by requiring that sharks be landed with fins attached. Domestic prohibitions on retaining listed elasmobranch species adopted by the EU, Turkey, Lebanon and Albania also mark significant progress for Mediterranean shark and ray species.

The Shark League has also been focusing on the implementation of strict measures to reduce mortality of North Atlantic shortfin makos by top fishing countries particularly those still without limits on North Atlantic catch (Spain, Portugal, and Morocco), as well as others with which the coalition has direct involvement (US and Canada).

6.3 Promote practical and enforceable conservation recommendations based on the best available science within relevant RFMOs, RSCAPs, biodiversity-related MEAs and FAO

ICCAT's ban on shark finning relies on a complicated fin-to-carcass ratio and is therefore difficult to enforce and exacerbates inadequacies in shark catch information. Working with the Shark League, Project AWARE is actively promoting banning the removal of shark fins at sea as a practical conservation measure to ease enforcement, eliminate the wiggle-room to fin sharks, and facilitate the collection of species-specific catch data.

8. Economic incentives

8.2 Develop opportunities for alternative livelihoods for and together with local communities.

Project AWARE has partnered with WWF and the Manta Trust to release the world's first "[Responsible Shark & Ray Tourism: A Guide to Best Practice](#)" as part of a global effort to create well managed shark and ray tourism operations, conserve species, and benefit local communities. Shark and ray tourism is on the rise globally. If current trends continue, the numbers of shark related tourism could more than double over the next twenty years. Developed in collaboration with science and industry, the guide was created to ensure that sites are established and managed in a manner that benefits sharks and rays, as well as local communities, whilst also inspiring respect and a greater appreciation of the need to conserve these animals amongst tourists. Project AWARE is using the guide to empower dive operators to lead by best practice to help build a better

future for sharks and rays as well as support their local community. Responsible shark and ray related ecotourism can be a powerful, complementary conservation strategy. It can also serve as an important supplementary source of income benefiting operators and the local communities alike.

Objective C: Ensuring to the extent practicable the protection of critical habitats and migratory corridors and critical life stages of sharks

Activities:

9. Conservation activities

9.1 Designate and manage conservation areas, sanctuaries or temporary exclusion zones along migration corridors and in areas of critical habitat, including those on the high seas in cooperation with relevant RFMOs and RSCAPs where appropriate, or take other measures to remove threats to such areas.

Project AWARE is a member of the Save Our Marine Life Alliance - a coalition of environmental groups working to protect and secure the world's largest network of marine reserves around Australia. In 2012 Australia created the largest network of marine reserves in the world. In December 2013, after 15 years of extensive scientific investigation and the most thorough public consultation process in Australia's History (750,000 submissions showing 95% support), the Government suspended the implementation of the sanctuary management plans. Since then, and with a continually changing political landscape in Australia, Project AWARE has worked with alliance partners advocating for Australia's marine sanctuaries to be reinstated. In July 2018, the Turnbull Government put Australia's marine park network into operation on the water, but in the process slashed these initial plans, reducing the scale of protections by nearly half. Over 80,000 submissions have been made opposing the Government's retrograde plans. In August 2018, Shadow Minister for Environment Tony Burke announced that a future Labor Government would restore marine parks back to the proposed 2012 levels.

9.4 Promote the protection of the marine environment from land-based and maritime pollution that may adversely affect shark populations

Marine debris has been identified as one of the key stressors impacting the global ocean and threatening the health and stability of vulnerable marine species including sharks and rays. Project AWARE's Clean Ocean strategy aims to reduce underwater impacts of marine debris and prevent trash from entering the ocean in the first place so that it cannot suffocate habitats or entangle and kill marine life. Recognizing the intricate complexity of the marine debris issue, Project AWARE forges strategic partnerships,

working with businesses, NGOs and governments to advocate for long-term solutions and influence policies at local, national and international levels. But global change is also empowered by grassroots action and that's why Project AWARE developed their flagship citizen science program, Dive Against Debris® - the first and only marine debris survey of its kind focused on scuba divers reporting types and quantities of debris found on the ocean floor. Additionally, the impacts of debris items on marine life is also recorded including whether any entangled animals were encountered and their fate - released unharmed, injured or dead. By using and sharing the data reported by Dive Against Debris volunteers, online and through our partnerships, we're helping bridge the gap in knowledge and build convincing arguments to lead to change.

Earlier this year, Project AWARE achieved a milestone - removing and reporting one million debris items from the seafloor across the globe. Having reached such a milestone, Project AWARE has announced its commitment to remove the next million by the end of 2020 – achieving in a little over two years, what was in seven. Project AWARE continues to mobilize a global community of citizen scientists – dive leaders and debris activists – and, by the end of 2020, aims to increase the number of Dive Against Debris® surveys submitted by 50%; and the number of dive sites monitored on a monthly basis by 30%. Additionally, Project AWARE is focusing on increasing data submissions in top plastic leakage countries in Asia Pacific, specifically Thailand, Indonesia and China and will work with nations in order to track their progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations. Through strategic collaboration, Project AWARE will also contribute to the scientific literature and further advance our knowledge and understanding regarding seafloor debris through data analysis of the exclusive Dive Against Debris dataset. Project AWARE also announced the removal of all single-use plastics from its operations, products and supply chain with immediate effect with a commitment to adhere to ISO 1400 Standards and embed the UN Sustainable Development Goals principle throughout its supply chain by end of 2020.

By physically removing debris that currently exists in the ocean, the lives of marine species including shark and ray species across the globe are being saved. Additionally, the quantitative dataset that Project AWARE is building, provides critical evidence necessary to inform solutions that prevent debris entering the ocean in the first place and thus, protects marine life from the negative impacts.

To date, over 50,000 scuba divers have participated in more than 6,700 surveys across the globe. Plastic debris continues to dominate, accounting for 64% of all debris items reported. [The top 10 debris items](#) have been identified with fishing line ranking number one.

In order to strengthen the global dataset and encourage volunteers to conduct repeat surveys at the same dive site, in 2016 Project AWARE launched the [Adopt A Dive Site™](#)

initiative whereby participants take ownership of their local dive site, committing to surveying the site at least once a month. To date, over 400 dive sites have been adopted globally.

Acknowledging their diverse global community that spans a variety of demographics, geographic locations and cultures, Project AWARE has created a variety of online and offline tools and [resources](#) freely available in multiple languages, in order to maximize engagement and participation of scuba divers in Dive Against Debris. Investing in innovative technology has also seen the development of the interactive [Dive Against Debris Map](#) which visualizes the global dataset as well as the freely available Dive Against Debris app - streamlining the data submission process and facilitating in-field data reporting.

Objective D: Increasing public awareness of threats to sharks and their habitats, and enhance public participation in conservation activities

Activities:

12. Awareness raising

12.2 Raise public awareness of threats to sharks and their habitats.

Global Shark Trade:

Following the release of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2015 report “*State of the Global Market for Shark Products*” by Felix Dent and Shelley Clarke, Project AWARE developed an [interactive infographic](#) which illustrates the full story of current, trade-related threats to shark and ray populations. With technical assistance from Dr. Clarke, as well as Sonja Fordham, Shark Advocates International founder and President, Project AWARE created a visual representation of the report that debunks myths about the global shark trade and points the way to key improvements. In addition to mapping out the top shark trading countries and routes, the infographic offers a close look at the challenges researchers face when studying these global markets, and highlights the measures necessary to increase trade traceability and sustainability. The infographic reveals the significant growth in markets for shark and ray meat, as well as the countries and inadequately restricted fisheries associated with this largely under-the-radar trade. The Infographic is a critical resource that helps to educate the wider public and raise awareness about a very complex issue affecting shark and ray populations globally.

#Divers4SharksNRays - CITES CoP17:

During 2016, Project AWARE collaborated with partner NGOs on a series of shark policy and advocacy initiatives including the adoption of international trade controls under CITES for 13 vulnerable shark and ray species. In the lead up to [CITES](#) CoP17, Project

AWARE brought scuba divers together in a global social media rally with a [digital campaign #Divers4SharksNRays](#) urging CITES Member Parties to secure adoption of CITES Appendix II proposals for nine species of mobula rays, three species of thresher sharks and the silky shark. The campaign garnered an unparalleled level of engagement and support from the international dive community. All 13 shark and ray species made it to Appendix II – ensuring that commercial international trade is strictly regulated to safeguard sustainability, legality and traceability for the long-term survival of these species in the wild.

ICCAT:

In the run-up to ICCAT 2017, Project AWARE brought scuba divers together in a global rally with an online petition campaign - #Divers4Makos - calling on ICCAT parties to heed scientific advice. Project AWARE used scuba divers' influence with governments to specifically ask popular dive destinations - Egypt, South Africa and the United States - to lead the way toward securing a ban on retention, transshipment and landings of Atlantic makos. In a series of 8 video messages Project AWARE, dive leaders and dive businesses expressed their concerns and shared their message to ICCAT Parties. The videos were widely shared on Project AWARE's communications channels reaching a total views of 7,657. To further support the petition and raise awareness of the plight of mako sharks, Project AWARE launched a #Divers4Makos photo campaign at the annual DEMA Show, 14-17 Nov, g 2017, giving exposure to the Shark League's RFMOs work at the largest trade-only event in the world for companies doing business in the scuba diving, ocean water sports and adventure/dive travel industries. The event attracted hundreds of exhibitors and thousands of dive and travel industry professionals from around the world.

Coinciding with Endangered Species Day, Project AWARE relaunched the #Divers4Makos petition in 2018 to urge top fishing nations - the EU (particularly Spain and Portugal), US, Japan, Morocco and Canada - to prohibit the retention of Atlantic shortfin mako sharks immediately, as advised by ICCAT scientists, and push for an Atlantic-wide ban at the November 2018 ICCAT meeting. The #Divers4Makos petitions have reached almost 20K signatures.

Project AWARE's Ugly Journey of Trash Infographic and video: Over the past 3 years, Project AWARE has continued to raise awareness and advocate for a more responsible use of plastic in daily life. Used as part of a collaboration with the touring exhibition "Out to Sea? The Plastic Garbage Project" launched by the Muse-um für Gestaltung of Zürich, Project AWARE's [Ugly Journey of Our Trash infographic and video](#) help raise awareness of the problems caused by marine litter. The travelling exhibition combines elements of science and art. By displaying plastic flotsams collected from beaches around the world, the exhibition aims at arousing public awareness of plastic waste. Visitors can gain an in-depth understanding of the chemical composition, classification and recycling processes of different plastic materials, and also learn about

the harmful effects of plastic waste on birds and marine animals, including sharks and rays. The exhibition has toured in over 20 countries since launched in 2012.

12.3 Raise public awareness of this Memorandum of Understanding and its objectives.

To raise public awareness of the CMS Sharks MOU, Project AWARE has created an [interactive timeline](#) of facts and information about shark and ray species listed under the CMS Appendices since 1999. A dedicated web page visited by over 1,500 web users provides information about the importance of protecting migratory shark and ray species and the CMS Sharks MoU in particular.

Objective E: Enhancing national, regional and international cooperation

Activities:

15. Cooperation with existing instruments and organizations related to shark conservation

15.1 Cooperate with NGOs engaged with shark conservation.

Project AWARE collaborates, co-creates and partners with various NGOs to use the power of international conservation agreements and management regulations for change. We call for national, regional and global management as well as conservation actions that heed all available scientific advice for limiting shark catches. We advocate for the full protection of shark species listed as Endangered or Critically Endangered by the IUCN and for the establishment of precautionary shark fishing limits and regulations to ensure all sharks are landed with their fins naturally attached. Projects completed in cooperation with NGOs engaged with shark conservation since 2016 includes the Global Shark Trade Infographic, the Responsible Shark and Ray Tourism Guide, and the Shark League for the Atlantic and Mediterranean.

16. Accession to international instruments relevant for the conservation and management of sharks

16.3 Encourage Signatories to implement the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995).

At the 33rd Committee on Fisheries (COFI), in Rome, Italy, 9-13 July 2018, Project AWARE joined GGGI partners in asking FAO to call on governments to fully endorse the

recommendations of the Technical Consultation on Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of Fishing Gear and ensure the necessary support for their implementation is provided. GGGI also asked the FAO to support a proposal to further develop a global program to prevent, reduce and eliminate ghost gear worldwide with a goal to have all fishing nets to contain identification tags by 2025.