Ecology Action Centre

Ecology Action Centre Statement to the ICCAT Compliance Committee

The Ecology Action Centre, in concert with our partners, appreciates this opportunity to contribute to the Compliance Committee's work to support shark conservation.

Shark Reporting

To mitigate the uncertainty that hinders shark population assessment and compliance monitoring, we echo repeated calls by the SCRS for CPCs to improve the reporting of their shark catches, as required. We note that some **17** CPCs failed to submit basic yet crucial Shark Check Sheets this year while many continue to fall short in the promulgation and documentation of specific domestic regulations mandated through ICCAT shark measures, most of which were agreed more than a decade ago.

Focus on discards

Of particular concern is the egregious lack of reporting on the number and species of sharks discarded by ICCAT vessels. Despite clear shark reporting obligations under both Task 1 data requirements and species-specific measures, reliable information on live and dead shark discards is missing from most CPCs. Reports are inconsistent both within and across CPCs. Several CPCs report discards sporadically; the number of species reported as discards can also vary widely from year to year.

From 2016 to 2024:

- Only 19 CPCs reported any shark discards at all;
- Only five CPCs consistently reported on their shark discards for each year; and
- Four of the top 10 shark catching CPCs claim their vessels did not discard any sharks.

Only six CPCs consistently report more than 100t of shark discards in a given year (2016-2024), indicating significant underreporting given what is known about overall landings volumes and typical shark bycatch ratios.

Consequences are warranted for CPCs failing to report shark discards altogether. Explanations should be sought from those reporting "zero" shark discards.

We also note that our collective understanding of this central shark conservation issue would be greatly enhanced by substantial increases in observer coverage for longline fleets, as repeatedly advised by the SCRS.

Opportunities

We are pleased that ICCAT's new Shark Check Sheet exemption procedure (COC_328/25) — the result of much COC deliberation — has been properly initiated through the SCRS granting Norway's requested partial exemption for reporting shark species not occurring in the area of their fishery.

This COC meeting offers opportunities for additional concrete progress, especially as the shark discard issue has been identified as a priority matter on the agenda. We urge the COC to:

- Underscore the importance of timely and complete shark fishery data reporting;
- Flag potential non-compliance with shark discard reporting in the 2027 Compliance Summary tables (COC_308);
- Prohibit CPCs identified in COC 303_Appendix 3 *(No Data, No Fish)* from retaining the shark species for which Task 1 data are owed;
- Prohibit CPCs claiming exemptions to hammerhead and silky shark retention bans from landing those species if the associated Task 1 data (including discards) are incomplete;
- Examine the reliability of CPCs' shark discard numbers, particularly compared to catch.

Increased scrutiny and consequences for non-compliance are vital to effective shark conservation. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to a productive COC meeting.