Pro Wildlife Statement to Panel 4

25th Special Meeting of the Commission of ICCAT

16–23 November 2026

Key priorities for sharks

1. North Atlantic shortfin mako: reject any weakening of measures

In 2025, total fishing mortality was 779 t, more than three times the limit of 250 t set in Rec. 21-09. Over 80% of it came from dead discards. Under the Commission's own rule, the retention allowance for 2027 is -529 t.[1] The 2026 assessment finds the population still overfished (61.6% probability). Its finding that overfishing has ended rests on a single high-productivity scenario, while the scientists themselves warn that nearly all observed data come from juveniles.[2] [3]

- **Maintain the retention ban without exceptions.** The US proposal PA4_814, however, would raise the mortality limit from 250 t to 1,400 t – more than five times the current limit – and allow live or dead shortfin makos above minimum sizes to be retained, even though the proposal itself admits the underlying biology may change once age validation is completed in 2027. Size limits, which the SCRS has not found to be effective[4], would target the most reproductively valuable animals, and biological data do not require retention: samples can be taken from dead discards at any time. Thus, PA_814 should not be supported.
- **Do not weaken the rebuilding plan on the basis of an uncertain assessment.** If Rec. 21-09 is revised, it should only be strengthened: rebuild the population with at least 70% probability by 2050 at the latest, in line with the South Atlantic. The SCRS suggestion to update the plan based on a shorter generation time (19 instead of 25 years) must be rejected until the age-validation study confirms the underlying biology.
- **Finally adopt the additional mortality-reduction measures Rec. 21-09 requires.** These include spatial-temporal closures of high-concentration areas, such as around Cabo Verde and in the central North Atlantic in summer[5], a documented move-on rule, and a ban on wire traces and shark lines, as already adopted by WCPFC and IOTC.[6] [7]

2. South Atlantic shortfin mako: make retention conditional on compliance

The total mortality limit of 1,000 t adopted in Rec. 25-08 is more precautionary than the 1,295 t advised in 2025[8], but it is still high. The margin is thin: mortality exceeded 1,000 t as recently as 2023, and the SCRS now calculates a retention allowance of 572 t for 2027.[9] A single CPC accounted for 71% of all 2025 landings, and its live releases were reported only after the deadline. Dead discards rose by 44% between 2023 and 2025.[9]

- **Validate PA4_811 as it stands.** Rec. 25-08 already prohibits retention for CPCs that do not submit monthly landing reports. By 29 October 2026, only four CPCs had done so. Applying this rule cuts the possible retention for 2027 from 572 t to about 284 t.[10]
- **Deny retention where reporting duties are not met.** The Compliance Committee should apply the zero-retention consequence foreseen in Rec. 25-08 to any CPC that has not submitted its Shark Implementation Check Sheet.[10]
- **Enforce existing reporting duties.** Not a single CPC submitted information on its mitigation measures in 2026, as Rec. 25-08 requires.[Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.] Without it, the SCRS cannot advise which measures work.
- **Extend gear-based measures to the South Atlantic.** Research on data loggers and hook timers is valuable but long-term.[11] It cannot replace action now.

3. Blue sharks: set the objectives without delay

Blue sharks are commercially valuable but still not managed to the same standard as tunas. The MSE is now scheduled for 2027 to 2029, later than the roadmap the Commission adopted in 2024. The SCRS once again asks the Commission to define management objectives.[12] [13]

- **Adopt the EU proposal PA4_812 at this meeting without further delay.** It sets interim objectives for both populations that match those for North Atlantic swordfish: at least 60% probability of being in the green quadrant and at most 15% risk of falling below the limit reference point.[14] This is the minimum, not best practice. As a non-binding resolution, it guides the development of management procedures rather than fixing final targets – and it must not be postponed again as it was last year, so that management procedures can be adopted by 2028. As the MSE progresses, the Commission should:
  - ensure that TAC decreases are not capped when a population falls below B_{MSY};
  - consider more precautionary values (70% green quadrant, at most 10% risk), for which ICCAT has precedent[15];
  - address shortfin mako bycatch through the management objectives (see next main point);
  - a binding deadline in the operative text to adopt management procedures by 2029 at the latest.
- **Prioritise precaution over yield and keep the MSE focused.** To keep the MSE simple and on schedule, blue sharks should be managed for precaution rather than maximum yield. Concern regarding bycatch, e.g. for shortfin mako, should be addressed through the management objectives, e.g. a bycatch limit, or through exceptional circumstances, not through a multispecies MSE.[13]
- **Make discard reporting a prerequisite** for catch allowances in the following year.
- **Act now in the Mediterranean**, where blue sharks are critically endangered.[16] Given the scarcity of catch data, the 2027 assessment should consider alternative methods suited to data-limited stocks. The SCRS should be tasked to propose precautionary measures on the basis of its outcome. Until then, improve gear selectivity in swordfish fisheries and consider a retention ban.

4. Fins Naturally Attached: no exceptions

Fins Naturally Attached (FNA) is the global gold standard for enforcing a finning ban. IOTC (with a transition period until 2028), NAFO, NEAFC and GFCM have adopted it, as have many ICCAT members.

- **Adopt PA4_807 (USA/EU).** It prohibits removing fins at sea and requires all sharks to be landed with fins naturally attached, without exceptions.[17]
- **Strengthen PA4_807** with:
  - a clear definition of "shark", ideally all Chondrichthyes as in WCPFC CMM 2024-05, or at least the orders listed in IOTC Res. 25/08;[6] [7]
  - a mandatory prompt live release of sharks in non-target fisheries, with minimum standards for best handling and release practices, as ICCAT already requires for shortfin mako (Rec. 21-09, Rec. 22-11) and whale sharks;
  - annual reporting on implementation and enforcement at sea, in port and during transshipment, reviewed by the Compliance Committee.
- **Do not support PA4_806 (Japan).** It allows fins to be cut at sea and then tied or tagged to the carcass, with no end date[18] – weaker than IOTC Res. 25/08, which permits this only for frozen sharks and only until 2028.[7] Its review clause could even end the FNA requirement altogether, and Japan's own preamble concedes that sharks without fins can rarely be identified by species.

5. Further shark species in need of urgent action

- **Extend the retention ban to all thresher sharks.** In March 2026, CMS listed all three thresher species on Appendix I, partly because they are easily confused.[19] ICCAT, however, prohibits retention only of the bigeye thresher (Rec. 09-07). As long as common and pelagic threshers may still be landed, so misidentification undermines its protection. ICCAT should extend Rec. 09-07 to all *Alopias* species, in line with the obligations CMS Parties – including the EU – have now accepted.

- **Close the loopholes in the hammerhead ban.** Rec. 10-08 still exempts the bonnethead (*Sphyrna tiburo*), although it is classified as Endangered by the IUCN. Landings are reported only as *Sphyrna* spp., so mortality of individual species, including the scalloped and great hammerheads listed on CMS Appendix I in 2026[19], cannot be assessed. ICCAT should include all hammerheads in the ban and limit exemptions for developing coastal CPCs to subsistence fisheries with demonstrated compliance.

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[1] ICCAT SCRS Report 2026, item 19.31: North Atlantic shortfin mako retention allowance.

[2] ICCAT SCRS Report 2026, Executive Summary 12.15 SMA – Shortfin mako. 2026_SCRS_ENG.pdf

[3] Report of the 2026 ICCAT North Atlantic Shortfin Mako Shark Stock Assessment Meeting (including Blue Shark MSE), Lisbon, 8–12 June 2026, pp. 9–10.

[4] ICCAT SCRS Report 2026, Responses to the Commission, items 19.27–19.29 (compiled in PLE-104).

[5] Báez, J.C. et al. (2025). Spatial distribution of blue shark and shortfin mako catches in Spanish longline fisheries in the North Atlantic Ocean. SCRS/2025/166.

[6] WCPFC CMM 2025-05 and CMM 2024-05.

[7] IOTC Resolution 25/08.

[8] ICCAT SCRS Report 2025, pp. 86–87. 2025_SCRS_ENG.pdf

[9] ICCAT SCRS Report 2026, item 19.32: South Atlantic shortfin mako retention allowance.

[10] PA4_811/2026: South Atlantic shortfin mako (SMA-S): retention allowances for 2027 (ICCAT Secretariat), Tables 1–5 and Annex 1.

[11] ICCAT SCRS Report 2026, item 19.26; Coelho et al. (in press), SCRS/2026/242.

[12] ICCAT SCRS Report 2026, Recommendations: Sharks.

[13] Report of the Intersessional Meeting of Panel 4, online, 7–8 July 2026 (PA4_803/2026), item 6.2.

[14] PA4_812/2026: Draft Resolution by ICCAT on operational management objectives for Atlantic blue shark (EU); Rec. 24-10, para. 2 (replaced by Rec. 25-10).

[15] PA4_812_REV/2024 and PA4_815B/2023: North Atlantic swordfish MSE decision guides (safety thresholds of 10% and 15%; no cap on TAC decreases below B_{MSY}).

[16] Sims, D., Fowler, S.L., Ferretti, F. & Stevens, J. (2016). *Prionace glauca* (Mediterranean assessment). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: e.T39381A16553182.

[17] PA4_807/2026: Draft Recommendation concerning the conservation of sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by ICCAT (USA/EU).

[18] PA4_806/2026: Draft Recommendation concerning the conservation of sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by ICCAT (Japan).

[19] CMS (2026). Appendices I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, as amended by the Conference of the Parties in 2026. Effective 27 June 2026. https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/basic_page_documents/revised-appendices_cop15_e.pdf