

## Oceana Opening Statement to Panel 4

### 24th Regular Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas

2015 is a crucial year for Panel 4 - obstacles in the path towards sustainable fisheries management of all species under ICCAT's purview should be eliminated, while finally addressing two long-standing obligations: recovering Mediterranean swordfish to MSY levels and managing commercially exploited blue shark and shortfin mako.

- **Mediterranean swordfish – *Inaction is not an option:***

The stock assessment run in 2014<sup>1</sup>, reported that Mediterranean swordfish has been and remains overfished. This stock is currently in a bleak situation, with over 70% of its catches composed of juveniles, and a biomass that has declined by 2/3 since the 80s.

The too long neglected and unaddressed overexploitation of Mediterranean swordfish is creating the negative precedent of setting a double-standard within ICCAT. 67% of tuna and tuna-like stocks under ICCAT purview are managed on the basis of catch limits aimed at meeting Convention objectives. Yet, despite over 30 years of overfishing and an oversized fleet composed of over 15,800 vessels - 77% of all ICCAT vessels - targeting Mediterranean swordfish, this stock's catches remain unfortunately completely unregulated.

***Considering the bleak status of Mediterranean swordfish, ICCAT should adopt a recovery plan to rebuild this stock so as to ensure a high probability of ending overfishing in as short a period as possible, in line with Recommendation 11-13***

As the leading RFMO, ICCAT should ensure consistency and coherence when addressing management for stocks under its purview. Setting different standards for adjacent stocks, like the Atlantic and the Mediterranean swordfish, not only affects the status of the resource but also leaves the doors open to illegal fishing.

In order to achieve the Convention objective, the SCRS indicate that a reduction in fishing mortality is required. The SCRS suggest this reduction could eventually be achieved within the measures laid out in Recommendation 13-14. However, the effectiveness of these measures has been impossible to evaluate because of the lack of compliance with reporting obligation by certain CPCs on this particular stock. In addition, the 2014 stock assessment was conducted in the absence of Task 1 data from the major catching state for this particular stock, which likely interfered with the final outcome of the exercise.

Noting the dramatic status of the stock, Oceana urges ICCAT to act without delay and ensure the proper recovery of this stock by:

- i. Adopting a recovery plan for Mediterranean swordfish with a clear management target to urgently rebuild the stock to MSY levels through a Total Allowable Catches regime.
- ii. Requesting that SCRS conduct a new stock assessment, to assess the targets and provide advice on any readjustment to catch levels needed in light of the new, more complete scientific information available
- iii. Balancing fleet capacity with fishing possibilities within MSY.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the 2014 ICCAT Mediterranean Swordfish Stock Assessment Meeting (Heraklion, Greece – July 21 to 25, 2014)

- **Address the management of sharks:**

During the last three years, ICCAT has not agreed on any significant new management measures for sharks. With many shark species of interest to ICCAT considered threatened or nearly threatened, and increasing global attention on the need for cooperative management and conservation of sharks, it is clearly long overdue for ICCAT to demonstrate that it can manage its shark fisheries responsibly.

Oceana calls on ICCAT Contracting Parties to take immediate management action on three major aspects of shark management:

**1. Require sharks to be landed with their fins naturally attached, thereby closing long-standing loopholes in the ICCAT ban on shark finning:** in 2004, ICCAT adopted Rec. 04-10 in an attempt to prohibit the wasteful practice of shark finning, but this recommendation includes loopholes that allow illegal finning to continue. Incentives for finning remain, particularly for species prohibited for retention, or whose meat has low commercial value. Fisheries scientists recommend that the most effective approach to banning shark finning is to land sharks with their fins still naturally attached. A growing number of ICCAT CPCs are already adopting 'fins-attached' policies, including major shark fishing CPCs that together account for more than 75% of shark catches reported to ICCAT – suggesting that fins-attached is a feasible option for implementation across the Convention area. By requiring sharks to be landed with their fins attached, ICCAT would finally implement an enforceable ban on shark finning, would aid collection of key species-specific data on shark catches, and would help to enforce prohibitions on threatened species whose fins are valuable in trade. ICCAT should not permit a small minority of CPCs to once again block this measure from being adopted.

**2. Set science-based, precautionary catch limits for major commercially fished shark species in ICCAT fisheries, such as blue shark and shortfin mako:** blue sharks rank 4<sup>th</sup> in ICCAT species in terms of catch volumes reported. Within the ICCAT Convention area however, their fishery still lacks of any management. Precautionary catch limits should be adopted in order to ensure blue shark fisheries remain within the exploitation boundaries established by the Commission. The last stock assessment of shortfin mako in 2012 produced very uncertain results, and the SCRS recommendation is straightforward: catches of shortfin makos should not be permitted to increase until more reliable stock assessment results are available.

**3. Prohibit the retention, landing, and trade of highly threatened species, such as porbeagles:** Porbeagle sharks (*Lamna nasus*) are Critically Endangered in the Mediterranean and North-East Atlantic, and Endangered in the North-West Atlantic. The joint ICCAT/ICES porbeagle assessment in 2009 concluded that stocks were so depleted that recovery would take decades, or under if there were no longer any catches. Some nations and international bodies have already implemented conservation measures for porbeagle within the ICCAT Convention area. Retention, landing, and/or directed fisheries are prohibited by the EU, Uruguay, and NEAFC. In the Mediterranean, retention, landing, and trade are prohibited under the Barcelona Convention and GFCM. Globally, a CITES Appendix II listing of porbeagle entered into effect in September 2014, thereby requiring controls on international trade. Within ICCAT, however, no management measures have yet been adopted for porbeagle.