



**International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)
25th Regular Meeting, Marrakech, Morocco
Opening Statement, Panel 4**

Protecting Shortfin Mako Sharks

Our organizations are focused this year on the dire status of shortfin mako sharks (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), particularly in the North Atlantic, revealed through the recent assessment by the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS). We are encouraged to see several proposals to begin addressing serious overexploitation. At the same time, we are disappointed that none so far match the SCRS advice, which centers around -- with unprecedented clarity -- a complete prohibition on retention as a first, immediate step.

Whereas we recognize the challenges associated with this advice, we respectfully remind Parties that the SCRS has flagged the possibility of overfishing this species since 2004 and has specifically warned about its exceptional intrinsic vulnerability since the first Ecological Risk Assessment in 2008. Despite ranking third in terms of vulnerability to ICCAT fisheries, shortfin makos have been passed over for concrete conservation action while retention bans have been granted for many other shark species. Parties' responses to past SCRS advice to cap or reduce fishing mortality have been inadequate, leading to the serious and urgent situation we face today.

The alarm bells are now loud. For the North Atlantic, the SCRS reports:

- Overfishing is occurring on an overfished population (90% probability of both);
- Mortality must be cut to zero in order to have a reasonable chance of rebuilding over two decades (54% by 2040);
- Banning retention is the most effective immediate step; and
- Additional bycatch mitigation measures are needed.

While makos are inherently vulnerable, the species does survive capture relatively well. The SCRS notes post release survival can reach 70%. This rate can be improved through better handling and release techniques. Banning retention can therefore be effective at dramatically reducing mako fishing mortality, as needed.

A retention ban is also prudent for South Atlantic makos, given the uncertainty regarding this population, the species' vulnerability, enforcement challenges, and lessons from the North.

The situation for makos is now critical. We urge ICCAT to adopt measures to immediately minimize mortality on this vulnerable species, in line with the SCRS advice and the precautionary approach. It is also imperative that retention bans and bycatch mitigation measures be incorporated into a comprehensive rebuilding program with mechanisms to ensure reliable monitoring and accountability for effective implementation.

Preventing Shark Finning

We are pleased with the growing support for the joint proposal to require that all sharks be landed with their fins attached. We welcome new co-sponsors, and are hopeful that other Parties will join or rejoin this important initiative this week. Such action would:

- ease enforcement burden,
- eliminate wiggle-room to fin sharks,
- facilitate the collection of species-specific catch data, and
- complement adoption of this best practice by NEAFC and NAFO.

We appreciate Parties' consideration of our views.