

Preventing the collapse of endangered shortfin mako in the Atlantic must prevail over competing commercial interests and the Covid-19 induced shortcomings in negotiation and decision making at ICCAT 2020

The supporting environmental NGOs and representatives from the retail sector acknowledge that this year's decision-making process via correspondence is an extremely challenging task for both the delegations and the Chair of Panel 4. We therefore very much appreciate the continued attempt of all parties to achieve an agreement during this second round, and we call on all parties to **agree on the proposal for the conservation of endangered shortfin mako sharks in the Atlantic as presented by Canada, Senegal and the UK.**

We note that all submitted proposals and statements univocally recognise the imminent threat of collapse of the stock in the North Atlantic and that all parties are committed to end overfishing and aim for stock rebuilding by 2070.

Due to the many years of delay in implementing effective measures to end overfishing for this species we are, however, now facing a state of emergency. No further delays are acceptable and immediately effective steps to end overfishing and start stock rebuilding need to be implemented as a matter of priority, **together with a clear commitment for the implementation of additional measures and further research to reduce mortality**, as was also requested in statement PA4-823 (second round) by USA.

Unfortunately, so far only PA4-806, the proposal from Canada, Senegal and the UK, is in line with this objective by following SCRS advice for an immediate retention ban without any exceptions for the North Atlantic and a maximum TAC of 2001 t for the South Atlantic.

As noted in the recent email correspondence from Norway to Panel 4 Chair a "*recommendation that contains a TAC will give an incentive to fish mako and an incentive to retain the fish on board.*" The EU proposal PA4-804 will most likely not end overfishing, as a TAC of 500 t including dead discards, which "*does not include dead discards of live but potentially damaged fish*" will most likely not end overfishing, as "*mortality may be about twice as large as the fish mortality caused by a catch equivalent to TAC (SCRS / 2019/101).*"

PA4-805 from the USA proposes a TAC of 500 t (700 t in 2021) including live releases to stop overfishing and a further reduction of mortality through the implementation of best practices (PA-807), but the suitability and effectiveness of those practices is challenged by the EU to require additional discussion and research.

However, similarly to the EU proposal, the proposed TACs provide barely a 50% probability for stock rebuilding by 2070, despite a probability of at least 70% being required for sharks due to their biological characteristics. (NOAA 2019)

Postponement of the decision to a physical meeting in July 2021 is unfortunately not a viable option, because such a postponement would lead to another year of overfishing of this already overfished stock; thereby further decreasing the probability of stock rebuilding by 2070. **Therefore, an immediate decision for a retention ban in the North Atlantic and a TAC of 2001 t in the South Atlantic are the only viable options and should be agreed upon in 2020 as a matter of priority.** Otherwise we are at risk of losing this top predator in the Atlantic forever - with still unknown consequences for the complete ecosystem and the sustainable management of all teleost stocks.

Nevertheless, we appreciate the Chair's proposal to schedule an additional face-to-face meeting in 2021, as such a meeting should be used to discuss and agree upon additional measures to reduce mortality through the implementation of effective avoidance strategies and best practices for live release handling. Also, noting the converging positions of the EU and the USA with regard to the suitability of large circle hooks and other gear modification to reduce mortality, these options could then be discussed and supplemented with additional scientific evidence.

In preparation of this meeting in July 2021, we would recommend to already provisionally evaluate online meeting options in case the pandemic will still prevent us from having physical meetings.

Today, we urgently ask all ICCAT parties to publicly state their support for the only viable proposal (PA4-806), which is in line with the SCRS advice and the required conservation measures to prevent the irrevocable collapse of this endangered top predator. Please, let us all ensure that science and conservation will prevail over short-term commercial incentives and thereby provide a realistic probability for stock rebuilding in the North Atlantic within the next 50 years and prevent a similarly acute crisis in the South Atlantic.

The Signatories

L'Ailerons, Aktionsgemeinschaft Artenschutz, Animal Welfare Institute, Blue Sharks, BUND, CREMA, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Deutsche Stiftung Meeresschutz, Divers for Sharks, Dutch Shark Society, Fins Attached, Gallifrey Foundation, The Global Shark Conservation Initiative, Gesellschaft zur Rettung der Delphine, International Marine Mammal Project, International Pole and Line Foundation, NABU, Migros, Mundus maris, Pro Wildlife, Sharks Mission France, SHARKPROJECT International, Sea Shepherd Legal, WildAid, Whale and Dolphin Conservation & The Global Tuna Alliance, Migros and World Wise Foods

