

## ICCAT 2020 Joint NGO Opening Statement Plenary

On behalf of Shark Trust, with support from Ecology Action Centre, Project AWARE, Shark League for the Atlantic and Mediterranean, The Ocean Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Humane Society International, Wildlife Conservation Society and Defenders of Wildlife, we appreciate the opportunity to highlight our top priority for action by Panel 4 of ICCAT: **immediate protection for North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks.**

This particularly vulnerable and valuable shark is a species of global conservation concern. Last year, makos were classified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as Endangered and listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

ICCAT scientists have demonstrated that the North Atlantic shortfin mako population is exceptionally depleted and headed for collapse. The SCRS recently underscored its 2017 advice to completely ban retention from this population. ICCAT's failure to take this action is delaying the start of a recovery period that already likely spans five decades.

We were deeply troubled when a few Parties stood in the way of consensus on the science-based 2019 ICCAT proposal for makos from 10 Parties, leaving the species woefully under-protected. COVID-19 has further delayed mako management but has not stopped mako overfishing.

We stress that removing all incentive to catch makos is essential for minimizing mortality. Allowances to land dead makos create incentives for irresponsible fishing practices. Retention bans, on the other hand, shift the incentive to avoidance.

Prohibition is by far the most common measure that ICCAT has taken for sharks. The SCRS highlighted the 77% survival statistic to demonstrate that a retention ban can be effective for this species. Makos will unfortunately be discarded dead under any scenario. Concern over this fact is insufficient justification for rejecting the core advice.

ICCAT scientists have warned fishery managers about the inherent vulnerability of mako sharks for more than a decade and have delivered the same advice for North Atlantic shortfin makos for four years straight. The state of this population is poor and continues to deteriorate. Decisive ICCAT action in the coming weeks can finally start to reverse the decline, but half measures will not be enough. **To prevent irreparable collapse and minimize long-term negative impacts for all stakeholders, we need immediate, concerted, effective action across the North Atlantic in the form of the recommended retention ban.**

*It's make or break time for makos. The situation is dire. The advice is clear. The remedy is simple. Please act now.*

