

ICCAT 2021 Panel 4

Opening Statement

The Ocean Foundation

The Ocean Foundation appreciates this opportunity to encourage ICCAT action on the shark fishery management issues before Panel 4.

This week marks the fifth consecutive annual meeting that has Parties grappling with ICCAT scientists' advice for rebuilding overfished **North Atlantic shortfin makos**. An inadequate management response to the SCRS 2017 advice has exacerbated depletion and risks a collapse that is irreparable in our lifetimes.

We are pleased that ICCAT Parties have recently made time for makos and that support continues to grow for the cornerstone of the SCRS advice: **a complete prohibition on retention**. Such a ban is essential to achieving the substantial mortality reduction needed to reverse decline.

We oppose *any* North Atlantic shortfin mako landing allowances because they:

- Run counter to SCRS advice for a non-retention policy "*without exception*"
- Create incentive for irresponsible fishing practices that ensure mortality
- Further delay a multidecadal recovery.

Retention bans, on the other hand, are:

- Straightforward and readily enforceable
- Essential for removing incentives to encounter and kill valuable, threatened species
- The most common shark conservation measure imposed by ICCAT and its Parties
- Less restrictive than closing fisheries.

Mako sharks have **exceptionally low reproductive rates** and are therefore particularly susceptible to overfishing. Females don't begin to reproduce until age 18, remain pregnant for up to 18 months, and produce just 4-25 pups every 2-3 years. Because of these life history characteristics, recruitment does not fluctuate widely from year to year. North Atlantic recovery is likely to take five decades. Indeed, the SCRS predicts further decline until 2035. Relaxing protections before rebuilding begins would be seriously problematic.

As suggested by the UK and Norway and demonstrated by the US, rebuilding plans for slow growing sharks should be based on a **70% probability** (at least) of meeting recovery goals. A high chance of success reflects a precautionary approach that is clearly warranted for makos.

Additional mako **bycatch reduction measures** are needed to enhance recovery but cannot replace the ban or succeed without it. Finally prohibiting retention would allow a shift in focus to complementary initiatives aimed at helping fishers avoid makos and safely release those caught incidentally.

Additional **shark conservation issues** needing attention include:

- The lack of protection for South Atlantic shortfin makos
- Overages in the South Atlantic blue shark TAC
- The conservation status of other species.

We strongly support replacing the **finning ban's** complicated fin-to-carcass ratio with a requirement to land sharks with their fins still naturally attached. This best practice can ease enforcement, eliminate room to fin sharks, and facilitate collection of species-specific catch data.