



IUCN Shark Specialist
Group

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Dr. G Chapron
Assistant Professor
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SE - 73091 Riddarhyttan, Sweden

September 2nd, 2010

Dear Dr. Chapron:

RE: Biodiversity 100 tasks campaign

In response to your email request for actions that safeguard particular endangered species, we have provided one action that would dramatically enhance the conservation of sharks.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the IUCN Shark Specialist Group recommend that finning of sharks at sea is banned in all national and international waters through the requirement that all sharks be landed with their fins *naturally attached*, as is the case in most of Central America and Atlantic waters of the United States. Such measures vastly improve the ability to enforce finning bans and collect the species-specific shark catch information that is vital to population assessments. Hence, this simple policy provides a much-needed means of curbing shark mortality, preventing egregious waste, and monitoring the sustainability of shark fisheries worldwide.

This action is particularly pressing for the world's main shark fishing powers which can be determined through FAO 2008 landings data¹. India and Indonesia are the top two shark fishing countries in the world and yet have not banned shark finning. Taiwan and Argentina, fourth and seventh in global shark catch, also have yet to ban this wasteful practice. Of the other countries rounding out the top ten shark fishing entities -- Spain, Mexico, Japan, Portugal, and Brazil -- all but New Zealand have finning bans with significant loopholes that may allow the practice to continue.

Shark "finning" is the wasteful practice of cutting off a shark's fins and discarding its carcass at sea. Finning is driven by the discrepancy between generally low value shark meat and high value shark fins, a traditional, luxury seafood product in Chinese cuisine which retail for an average of US \$100/kg. Strong demand for fins contributes to the fishing pressure on shark populations around the world. Scientists estimate that the fins of 26 to 73 million sharks enter the global trade each year from all oceans of the world².

Approximately one-third of the shark fins traded each year are taken from oceanic pelagic sharks, most of which are caught incidentally in longline fisheries targeting tunas and billfishes. Of the 21 oceanic pelagic sharks, 11 species are considered threatened with extinction under the IUCN Red List criteria^{3,4}. This depletion is due largely to the demand for shark fins and the lack of effective controls on shark fishing.

The IUCN SSC's Shark Specialist Group (www.iucnssg.org) was established in 1991 in response to growing awareness and concern of the severe impact of fisheries on chondrichthyan populations around the world. The SSG aims to promote the conservation of the world's chondrichthyan fishes, effective management of their fisheries and habitats and, where necessary, the recovery of their populations. It is now one of the largest and most active

Promoting the sustainable use, wise management and conservation of all sharks, rays and chimaeras

of the IUCN SSC Specialist Groups, with 160 members from 90 countries distributed among 12 ocean-region sub-groups, all of whom are involved in chondrichthyan research, fisheries management, marine conservation, or policy development and implementation.

There are around 1150 described **Chondrichthyan fishes** and a new species is discovered approximately every two weeks. Chondrichthyans are a relatively small evolutionarily-conserved group that has functioned successfully in diverse ecosystems for over 400 million years. Despite their evolutionary success, many species are increasingly threatened with extinction as a result of human activities and the conservative life history traits of this group of fishes. Generally, chondrichthyans are slow-growing and late to mature with low fecundity. These characteristics result in very low rates of potential population increase with little capacity to recover from overfishing (direct or indirect) and other threats such as habitat destruction.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information on this action.

Regards,



Co-Chairs

Nicholas Dulvy and Andrés Domingo Balestra, on behalf of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group

References

- ¹ FAO, FishSTAT Capture Production (1950-2008) Database, Available at <http://www.fao.org>, (2008).
- ² Clarke, S. C., McAllister, M. K., Milner-Gulland, E. J., Kirkwood, G. P., Michielsens, C. G. J., Agnew, D. J., Pikitch, E. K., Nakano, H., and Shivji, M. S., *Global estimates of shark catches using trade records from commercial markets*, *Ecology Letters* **9**, 1115 (2006).
- ³ Dulvy, N. K. et al., *You can swim but you can't hide: the global status and conservation of oceanic pelagic sharks*, *Aquat. Conserv.* **18**, 459 (2008).
- ⁴ Camhi, M., Valenti, S. V., Fordham, S. V., Fowler, S. L., and Gibson, C., *The conservation status of pelagic sharks and rays: Report of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group Pelagic Shark Red List Workshop*, IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group, (2009).