

November 16th, 2021

An Open Letter from West and Central African Scientists and Researchers on Mako Shark Protection

To: Heads of Delegations, International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)

This week's ICCAT meeting is the fifth one where Parties grapple with scientists' warnings about serious overfishing of North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks. Inadequate management responses to the associated advice to ban all retention from this population risks a collapse of this valuable resource.

West and Central African researchers and scientists continue our work to protect and improve domestic management of sharks. The Sub-Regional Plan of Action for Sharks led to advances in research, data collection, and conservation throughout the region. We are increasingly concerned, however, about the role of international fishing fleets and distant markets on the dynamics of shark exploitation and trade in the region's waters, especially with respect to oceanic sharks like shortfin makos.

Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria, and Senegal were among the countries that successfully proposed listing mako sharks under the Convention for the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES). Since 2019, Senegal, Gabon, The Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and Angola have all championed through ICCAT a complete and immediate retention ban for North Atlantic shortfin makos as the cornerstone of a comprehensive rebuilding plan.

Scientists have specifically recommended a retention ban as the *most effective* way to achieve the substantial mortality reductions necessary to start the lengthy recovery of this shark. Such a ban is:

- Straight-forward and therefore readily enforceable for Parties in our region
- Key to changing the fishers' incentive toward avoidance
- Likely quite effective because of the species' relatively high post-release survival rates
- Less restrictive and economically damaging than closing entire fisheries

North Atlantic shortfin makos are now among the most endangered sharks in the world and continue to be overfished due to ICCAT inaction.

We call on all ICCAT Parties to act now and ensure immediate implementation of a ban on retention is part of any final mako agreement adopted at the 2021 Annual Meeting.

Signed,

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