

ICCAT 2025 Shark Conservation Priorities



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A Call on the International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) to Ensure:

- Finning Ban Enforcement
- Shortfin Mako Recovery
- Basking and White Shark Protection
- Blue Shark Sustainability
- Compliance with all Shark and Ray Conservation Measures

The Shark League continues to focus on rebuilding populations of the most inherently vulnerable species under ICCAT's purview: sharks and rays (elasmobranchs). We request priority attention to current requirements and proposed management measures that are essential for these species' recovery. Our recommendations are in line with the science-based, precautionary approach that is warranted for such slow growing animals.



Sam Matthews

Strengthen the Shark Finning Ban

The complicated fin-to-carcass weight ratio adopted as an enforcement standard by ICCAT more than *two decades ago* has proven problematic. The complexity and leniency of the ratio makes it exceptionally challenging to determine if ICCAT vessels are finning sharks, especially given seriously insufficient observer coverage for longline fisheries. The ratio also hinders the collection of species-specific information on shark catches that is sorely needed for population assessment and compliance monitoring.

Many ICCAT Parties' domestic finning bans have evolved to prohibit the removal of shark fins at sea (through a requirement that sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached) —the only fool-proof means to ensure that finning did not occur.

Requiring that sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached, *without exceptions*, can:

- greatly ease enforcement;
- eliminate loopholes to fin sharks without detection;
- prevent high grading of shark parts; and
- facilitate collection of species-specific catch data.

Increasingly accepted as best practice, the fins-naturally-attached method has been mandated by many countries around the world and several other Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). Allowing partial cutting and folding fins against shark bodies can address safety and storage concerns for frozen as well as fresh sharks. ICCAT proposals for this policy regularly attract co-sponsorship and support from the vast majority of Parties.

Parties supporting fins-attached proposals at ICCAT in recent years



Submitted by the United States, Canada, Belize, South Africa, the European Union, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Norway, Liberia, Mexico, Egypt, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados, Costa Rica, The Gambia, United Kingdom, France (on behalf of Saint Pierre and Miquelon), Trinidad & Tobago, Gabon, Korea (Rep.), Venezuela, Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Albania, Curaçao, Libya, Angola, Guinea, Nigeria, Brazil, Morocco, Mauritania, Honduras, Cabo Verde, Namibia, São Tomé e Príncipe, El Salvador, Ghana, Iceland, and the Philippines.

Reverse Shortfin Mako Declines

The latest calculations by the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) reveal that fishing mortality of Atlantic shortfin makos (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) remains excessive. To reverse serious declines for these exceptionally vulnerable and valuable key predators, we urge Parties to:

- extend the current North Atlantic retention ban and take additional steps to ensure total bycatch mortality is held to the 250t limit; and
- reduce the South Atlantic Total Allowable Catch (TAC) to no more than 1000t (consistent with a ~70% probability of rebuilding by 2040).

Close Protection Gaps for Basking and White Sharks

ICCAT retention bans and safe release protocols are vital to minimizing bycatch mortality of highly migratory, globally threatened Atlantic shark species, including the basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*) and

white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*). Such measures are in line with 2009 and 2025 SCRS advice (to protect low-data elasmobranchs with high vulnerability and conservation concern) and can also serve to:

- bolster national protections;
- amplify guidance for maximizing survival; and
- fulfill obligations under other treaties.

Ensure Blue Shark Sustainability

ICCAT's management of Atlantic blue sharks (*Prionace glauca*) offers initial models for other RFMOs as well as hope for achieving sustainable shark fishing on an international scale. We remain concerned, however, about ongoing risk for catch allocation overages, particularly in the South Atlantic. To improve the outlook for long-lasting blue shark conservation, we urge Parties to improve domestic quota enforcement mechanisms and encourage the SCRS to continue to advance ICCAT's Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process for both Atlantic blue shark populations.



Improve Compliance

We welcome the Shark Check Sheet submission **exemption procedure** developed by SCRS, as requested in ICCAT Rec 18-06. This long-awaited, straight forward procedure:

- provides for a transparent record of discussion;
- establishes clear roles and timelines; and
- requires Parties to make a strong case for any exemption.

We look forward to seeing this procedure adopted by the Compliance Committee and the full Commission so that the ICCAT Shark Check Sheets can fulfill their intended purpose to validate compliance and improve implementation of ICCAT shark requirements at the domestic level.

To further ensure the overall effectiveness of ICCAT shark conservation measures, we urge Parties to work — independently and within ICCAT — to:

- improve the **reporting** of shark landings, discards, and national regulation details; and
- increase **observer coverage** (human and/or electronic) for longline vessels to 20% and commit to additional incremental increases to reach 100% coverage on all industrial vessels.

We appreciate the interest in streamlining processes associated with ICCAT's shark measures but urge Parties to prioritize **bolstering rather than consolidating** measures, especially given the usually insufficient time allocated to sharks on the ICCAT agenda. Should consolidation proceed, we urge Parties to:

- include all existing elasmobranch measures (including the mobula ray retention ban);
- prevent any relaxation of restrictions; and



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- eliminate problematic exceptions that allow select Parties to land threatened bigeye thresher (*Alopias superciliosus*), hammerhead (family Sphyrnidae other than *Sphyrna tiburo*), and/or silky sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*).

Recap

The Shark League urges Parties at the 2025 annual ICCAT meeting to:

- End at-sea shark fin removal, without exceptions;
- Adopt retention bans and release protocols for basking and white sharks;
- Continue the North Atlantic shortfin mako retention ban;
- Reduce the South Atlantic shortfin mako TAC to no more than 1000t;
- Approve the SCRS Shark Check Sheet submission exemption procedure;
- Scrutinize and address non-compliance with any/all elasmobranch measures; and
- Prioritize enforcing shark fishing limits on the water over consolidating them on paper.

The Shark League of the Atlantic and Mediterranean was formed with support from the Shark Conservation Fund to advance responsible regional shark and ray conservation policies. Shark Advocates International, Ecology Action Centre, Shark Trust, and PADI AWARE Foundation are the coalition's founding members.

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