

## **Eighteenth Meeting of the Animals Committee, Costa Rica, 8–12 April 2002**

### **Information Paper – Australia**

#### **Conservation of Sharks – Progress**

##### **Background**

Sharks and rays (Class Chondrichthyans) are vulnerable to exploitation due to their life history characteristics such as late attainment of sexual maturity, long life spans, slow growth and low fecundity. Each female only produces enough young to replace the population under low or natural levels of mortality and as such are unable to adapt as a response to the impacts of threats by producing larger numbers.

Concern over the range of threats to sharks has been growing internationally. A recently revised World Conservation Union (IUCN) Red List (IUCN 2000) now has 79 sharks listed as ranging from “critically endangered through to “lower risk near threatened”. The term 'shark' is taken to include all species of shark, skates, rays and chimaeras (Class Chondrichthyes) unless otherwise specified, in which case the term 'true sharks' refers to sharks only.

One important threat to shark conservation is over fishing, especially in unregulated fisheries. It is estimated that 50% of the global catch of Chondrichthyans is taken as bycatch that is largely unmanaged – thus the bycatch of Chondrichthyans does not appear in official fishery statistics. Reported landings of Chondrichthyan fishes currently exceed 760,000t per year. A small component consists of chimeras, but it appears that most of the landings are fairly evenly divided between sharks and batoid elasmobranchs (rays and skates). In many regions, increased trade in shark products such as fins, cartilage and liver oil has played a significant role in increased shark harvests in recent years. Chondrichthyans provide approximately 1%, and hence sharks about 0.5% of the worlds fisheries products. (Walker 1998)

A range of multilateral agreements and organisations have recognised the precarious nature of sharks and drawn attention to the need to do more to ensure the protection of threatened and vulnerable sharks. These organisations and agreements include:

- IUCN which has recognised a number of sharks as being threatened on their Red List and are working to address shark issues through the Species Survival Commission (SSC);
- the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to promote international cooperation for conservation and optimum utilisation of the species and specifically in the case of sharks, those listed on Annex I of UNCLOS;
- the whale shark is listed on Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS); and
- the International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks by the FAO.

CITES has also sought to increase protection afforded to sharks by seeking to cooperate with the FAO and other international fisheries management organisations to establish programs to collect and assemble the necessary biological and trade data on shark species and work towards better management of shark fisheries.

## **Actions to Date**

### **Relevant CITES Resolutions**

At the 9<sup>th</sup> CITES Conference of the Parties in 1994 a resolution on Biological and Trade Status of Sharks was adopted (Resolution 9.17), requesting *inter alia* that (1) FAO and other international fisheries management organisations establish programs to collect and assemble the necessary biological and trade data on shark species; and (2) all nations utilising and trading specimens of shark species cooperate with the FAO and other international fisheries management organisations.

At the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (1997), Decision 10.48 regarding the biological and trade status of sharks was adopted:

*To achieve effective implementation of Resolution Conf. 9.17:*

- a) *the Parties concerned should, in collaboration with FAO and regional fisheries organizations, improve methods to accurately identify, by species, record and report landings of sharks from directed fisheries and sharks taken as a by-catch in another fishery;*
- b) *Parties that have a shark fishery and/or trade in sharks and shark parts and derivatives should establish appropriate species-specific recording and reporting systems for all sharks that are landed as a directed catch or a by-catch;*
- c) *Parties that have a shark fishery should initiate efforts to:*
  - i) *collect species-specific data on landings, discards and fishing effort;*
  - ii) *compile information on life-history and biological parameters such as growth rate, life span, sexual maturity, fecundity and stock-recruitment relationships of sharks taken in their fisheries;*
  - iii) *document the distribution of sharks by age and sex, as well as their seasonal movements and interactions between populations; and*
  - iv) *reduce mortality of sharks captured incidentally in the course of other fishing activities; and*
- d) *the Parties concerned are encouraged to initiate management of shark fisheries at the national level and establish international/regional bodies to co-ordinate management of shark fisheries throughout the geographic range of species that are subject to exploitation, in order to ensure that international trade is not detrimental to the long-term survival of shark populations.*

During the past year, two Parties have taken action on sharks by listing two shark species on CITES Appendix III. Australia has listed *Carcharodon carcharias* (Great White Shark) and the United Kingdom has listed *Cetorhinus maximus* (Basking Shark). These listings requires the respective Parties to issue CITES permits to allow trade and all other Parties trading in the species to issue a Certificate of Origin (stating where the specimens come from). These certificates of origin will be reported to the Secretariat each year in the Parties annual report, enabling a trail to be built up of where exports of the species are coming from and where they were going. This will assist Australia

and the United Kingdom to regulate trade in specimens and enable all Parties to gain a greater understanding of trade in the species and any parts or derivatives of the species.

### **Relevant FAO Actions**

At the 23rd Session of the Food and Agriculture Organisation Committee on Fisheries (COFI) held in February 1999, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the International Plans of Action (IPOA) on the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks) was agreed. The guiding principles of the IPOA-Sharks are:

1. **Participation.** *States that contribute to fishing mortality on a species or stock should participate in its management.*
2. **Sustaining stocks.** *Management and conservation strategies should aim to keep total fishing mortality for each stock within sustainable levels by applying the precautionary approach.*
3. **Nutritional and socio-economic considerations.** *Management and conservation objective and strategies should recognise that in some low-income food-deficit regions and/or countries, shark catches are a traditional and important source of food, employment and/or income. Such catches should be managed on a sustainable basis to provide a continued source of food, employment and income to local communities.*

The IPOA-Sharks is voluntary and has relevance to States that have as part of their Exclusive Economic Zones, waters in which sharks are caught, as well as to States whose vessels catch sharks on the high seas. All States whose vessels conduct directed shark fisheries or regularly take sharks in non-directed fisheries are encouraged by COFI to adopt a National Plan of Action for the conservation and management of shark stocks (NPOA - Sharks). The IPOA-Sharks directs that such shark-plans should, *inter alia*, aim to ensure that catches of all species of shark from directed and non-directed fisheries are sustainable– and encourages States to have a national plan of action for shark prepared by the COFI Session held in 2001.

### **Issues**

To be fully effective the conservation of sharks requires action from all States with active shark fisheries. Progress with the development of NPOAs - sharks has been very slow. At the 24th Session of FAO COFI Rome (March 2001) only two States (the United States of America and Japan) had adopted a Shark-Plan. A verbal report provided by the Chairman of the CITES Animals Committee at its 17th meeting (Hanoi, Vietnam 30 July to 2 August 2001) failed to demonstrate further progress by other countries in the development of NPOA's. Of the 87 FAO members where the IPOA on sharks should be applied:

- 47 member countries have not shown any intention to prepare a National Shark Plan;
- 15 have noted their intention to prepare a NPOA but in some cases this is provisional on the availability of resources or external assistance;
- 16 member countries (Australia included) are progressing with their NPOA's; and
- Seven member countries have not provided any information on whether they are preparing NPOA's or intend to prepare NPOAs.

The report from the Chairman of the Animals Committee (AC) to the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP12) on progress made on the implementation of the IPOA-Sharks will be important in determining the progress being made to protect sharks. Of particular importance will be information addressing the issues of the unsustainable catch of sharks and the collection of both biological and trade data.

There is also concern that the actions outlined in Decision 10.48 of CoP10 have not been fully implemented. In particular the action requiring relevant Parties to undertake stock assessments has only been implemented by 15 Parties. Even so, the information provided in the assessments undertaken to date provides a good basis for Parties and the AC to examine the reports and identify

key shark species with a view to progressing possible listing of shark species under CITES Appendix I, II or III.

While individual Parties can and should begin the process of proposing specific species of sharks for listing on CITES Appendices, there is also a parallel role that the AC can play. In particular, consideration could be given to the role that the AC could play in examining information provided by range states in Sharks Assessment Reports, with a view to identifying key species and examining these for consideration and possible listing under CITES.

## References

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) (2000)  
<http://www.wcmc.org.uk/cms/>

Food and Agriculture Organisation (1999) International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks 1999. <http://www.fao.org/fi/ipa/ipae.asp>

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Stevens J. D., Bonfil R., Dulvy N.K. and Walker P.A. (2000) The Effects of fishing on sharks, rays and chimaeras (chondrichthyans), and the implications for marine ecosystems ICES Journal of Marine Science 57:476-494.2000

United Nations (1997) The Law of the Sea United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea United Nations Publication, New York.

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