

Press Release

For Immediate Release



Media contact:

Liz Morley: +1 843.693.5044

Big Day in European Shark Conservation

EU Officials Sign UN Migratory Shark Initiative, Propose Stronger Finning Ban

Bergen, Norway. November 21, 2011. The European Union (EU) today became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Sharks, just as the European Commission announced a proposal to strengthen the EU ban on shark 'finning' (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea). EU representatives signed the Shark MoU at a ceremony at the 10th Conference of the CMS Parties which opened today in Bergen while the announcement on the finning proposal came from Commission headquarters in Brussels.

"Today the EU has taken two major steps for sharks that demonstrate continued progress in European policy and offer new hope for safeguarding these vulnerable species on a global scale," said Sonja Fordham, President of Shark Advocates International, who is attending the CMS meeting. "We call on the EU Council and Parliament to promptly adopt the European Commission's finning ban proposal and encourage all fishing nations to fully engage in ensuring CMS shark conservation initiatives succeed."

The CMS Shark MoU was completed in early 2010 to promote conservation of migratory sharks, particularly the seven threatened species listed under the global CMS treaty: great white, whale, basking, shortfin mako, longfin mako, spiny dogfish (Northern hemisphere), and porbeagle sharks. More than 20 CMS Parties and cooperating non-Parties (such as the United States) have now signed the Shark MoU. Beyond more MoU signatories, next steps include finalization of an accompanying action plan and a meeting of the signatories. Later this week, CMS Parties will also consider a proposal from Ecuador to list manta rays, similarly vulnerable relatives of sharks, under the CMS Appendices. CMS has 116 Parties.

After years of debate, the European Commission has proposed an amendment to the EU shark finning ban that would close loopholes stemming from special permits that allow fishermen to remove shark fins at sea. Mandating that all shark fins remain attached through landing, as proposed by the Commission, is the most reliable way to prevent finning. The 'fins naturally attached' policy is supported by most conservationists and scientists, and is in place for most U.S. and Central American fisheries; it has been opposed by officials in Spain, whose fishermen rank 3rd in the world for shark catches. The Commission's proposal will now be considered by the European Council of Fisheries Ministers and the European Parliament through a process that is expected to last at least six months.

Shark Advocates International (SAI) is a project of The Ocean Foundation established to advance sound policies for sharks and rays. SAI works with the Shark Alliance coalition to promote a stronger EU finning ban.