

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the national level, the Spanish government is urged to take immediate action to:

- limit shark catches to scientifically advised or precautionary levels;
- protect key shark habitats;
- minimise bycatch and discard mortality;
- eliminate excess fleet capacity;
- prevent the taking of particularly vulnerable or endangered shark species;
- expand the *Spanish Catalogue of Threatened Species* to include sharks;
- ensure accurate and prompt reporting of species-specific shark fisheries data;
- ensure accurate reporting and traceability of shark trade by species and product;
- educate fishermen and sellers as to shark species identification and restrictions;
- improve buyer and consumer awareness of shark products and shark status;
- enhance scientific expertise in shark biology, ecology and population dynamics;
- abide by improvements to finning regulations, as proposed in the EU Shark Plan; and
- evaluate the feasibility of a 'fins-attached' rule for Spanish shark fisheries.

At the EU and international level, Spain is urged to actively assist in advancing:

- a strengthened EU finning regulation, as proposed;
- improvements in species-specific shark fisheries and trade data;
- protection for endangered shark species and their habitats;
- science-based catch limits for sharks;
- a reduction in RFMO fin-to-carass ratio limits to 5 percent dressed weight;
- adherence to CITES shark listings, resolutions and decisions;
- the adoption of German CITES proposals for spurdog and porbeagle sharks; and
- agreements for shark species listed under the CMS, particularly makos.



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SPAIN: A driving force in shark fishing around the world

A review of Spanish shark fisheries and management problems with recommendations for change

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Sharks are among the ocean's most vulnerable animals and Spain is a driving force behind their catch, trade and depletion.

For more than a decade, Spain has been one of the top five world powers with respect to the fishing and marketing of sharks. Spain's fishing fleets, employing various fishing gears, are spread throughout the world and take sharks as targeted and incidental catch. Approximately 50 percent of the European Union's (EU) catch of 'sharks' (this term covers all cartilaginous fishes: sharks,

Spain's hundreds of pelagic (open ocean) longline vessels catch and land primarily pelagic shark species, such as mako and blue sharks. Although their meat is often used, these sharks – indeed most shark species – are mainly kept for their fins, which are used in the Asian delicacy 'shark fin soup'. Using bottom longlines and gillnets, Spanish fishermen also target deep-sea sharks, whose fins may be used, their meat consumed, and their liver oil marketed for cosmetic and pharmaceutical products.

Total Allowable Catch (TAC)

The EU limits the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of deepwater sharks, spurdog, porbeagles, skates and rays (all valued for their meat). Spain is given a share of all these TACs. The porbeagle is the only pelagic shark for which catch by EU vessels is regulated.

For most shark species, the disparity between their high-value fins and considerably lower-value meat encourages the practice of 'finning' – the removal of the shark's fins and disposal of the carcass into the sea – a practice that results in the waste of more than 95 percent of the animal. Finning was banned by Spain in 2002 and by the whole of the EU in 2003. Loopholes in the EU regulation (which now applies to Spain), however, make it the most lenient in the world. Fin removal is allowed as an exception to the rule through special permits and is regulated according to the proportion of the weight of the carcass to the weight of the fins. The EU weight ratio limit (5 percent of total weight) is already more than twice the level that is recommended by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and used by many other countries, yet Spain regularly argues to increase it. In addition, fins and carcasses can be offloaded separately in different ports, making effective control difficult, if not impossible. Spain has issued the largest number of special fin-removal permits of any EU



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Fins

incidental take) and obligations to report shark catch statistics to fisheries authorities have been largely ignored. The non-reporting of species-specific catch and landings data and the loss of fisheries data through differing reports to national and regional authorities limit the potential for effective shark fisheries management. Mislabelling at Spanish fish auctions and misleading names for shark products (*cazón* or *marrajo*) in Spanish markets complicate attempts to form an accurate picture of shark use and rob consumers of the opportunity to be informed about their seafood choices.

Aside from EU rules, Spain has practically no management and control measures with regard to its vast shark fisheries; domestic legislation does not offer any special protection to any species of shark, even those threatened with extinction.

country by far, currently offering them to nearly two-thirds of its longline fleet.

The most effective means of enforcing a finning ban is to require that sharks are landed with their fins naturally attached. This method also improves the ability to collect species-specific catch information.

Until recently, shark catches have been generally disregarded by fisheries managers as bycatch (or

Spanish fisheries officials and industry have reported on the development of a National Shark Plan, but at the time of going to press, this had not been finalised.

Shark Action Plan

In the meantime, the European Commission has produced its final Shark Action Plan, which EU Member States must help to implement, and which should serve as a blueprint for Spain. The EU plan aims to improve the status of shark populations and the sustainability of shark fisheries through science-based catch limits, stronger rules on finning and discarding, and improved systems for catch reporting, trade and traceability.

Most sharks have low reproductive rates; intensive fishing of their populations quickly tends towards collapse. Assessments by the IUCN reveal that many shark populations, especially those of the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea, are seriously depleted.

Sharks are known to play important roles in the balance of marine ecosystems as major regulators of food chains. Although the precise consequences associated with a loss of sharks are not known, they are most likely to be negative – for the environment and for fisheries.

As Spain has led the way when it comes to the commercialisation of sharks and the negotiation of international fishing rules, it also has a responsibility to be at the forefront of the development of sound shark conservation policies.



JEFF ROTMAN/NATURE PL

Hammerhead shark

rays and chimaeras) is taken by Spain. Vigo (in Galicia, Spain) is Europe's largest fishing port and facilitates the export of shark meat to European markets and fins to Asia, primarily Hong Kong and mainland China. Spain's interest in promoting shark fishing over shark conservation is reflected by the dominant role the country plays in negotiations of EU fisheries bodies and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), as well as its failure to assist its EU colleagues in advancing shark conservation initiatives through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) or to propose shark species for listing under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

Shark embryos



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