

SSN Sharks

Fall 2015, Issue 4



The Species Survival Network Shark Working Group is pleased to provide to you the fourth issue of SSN Sharks, a publication regarding sharks, rays, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Success Stories

Petitions present substantial evidence to list smooth hammerhead and bigeye thresher under ESA (US)

On August 11th, the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published positive 90-day findings for smooth hammerhead (*Sphyrna zygaena*) and bigeye thresher (*Alopias superciliosus*) sharks in response to petitions to list these species under the Endangered Species Act submitted by Defenders of Wildlife in April 2015. NMFS' findings mean listing may be warranted, and the agency will conduct status reviews for the two species before making 12-month findings. The two species are threatened by commercial fishery bycatch, shark finning, and ocean pollution. The smooth hammerhead has declined 91% in the Northwest Atlantic and 64% off the coast of California. The bigeye thresher has declined 80% in the Northwest Atlantic and Eastern Pacific. The International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Endangered Species lists both sharks as Vulnerable worldwide. Existing national and international protections have proven ineffective in recovering the sharks and protecting the species from bycatch. Defenders will submit extensive comments supporting the decision to list the species as endangered.

UPS bans shipment of shark fins

On August 19th, the United Parcel Service (UPS) banned the shipment of shark fins, joining 31 airlines that have also banned shark fin cargo. UPS' decision stemmed from enforcement and misidentification concerns. In addition to a successful online advocacy campaign, during the month leading up to the announcement, conservationists protested outside UPS depots to pressure the company to impose the ban.

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CITES Notification of Interest

No. 2015/054 regarding CITES CoP17: Financial support for the Sponsored Delegates Project

The notification provides information for government delegates seeking support to attend CITES CoP17. If you are working with a government that may need funding, please encourage them to apply.

Note that only Management Authorities may apply. Applications must be received by 30 April 2016.

2015 – 2016 CITES Calendar

9 – 16 November: 24th regular meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Malta

11 – 15 January 2016: 66th meeting of the CITES Standing Committee, CICG, Geneva, Switzerland

1 June 2016: FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI), 32nd session, Rome, Italy

24 September – 5 October 2016: 17th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP), Johannesburg, South Africa

Regulatory Updates

EUROPEAN UNION:

An 11 February 2015 article reported that the European Commission added tope sharks, porbeagle sharks, deep sea sharks, starry rays, thornback rays, manta/devil rays, and sawfish to the list of species that commercial fishing vessels are prohibited from catching in EU waters.

UNITED STATES:

A 22 June 2015 article reported that the state of Texas enacted a ban on the sale or possession of shark fins in the state, joining other states (Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, California, Illinois, Maryland, Delaware, New York, and Massachusetts) and three territories (American Samoa, Commonwealth of Mariana Islands, and Guam).

A 4 July 2015 article reported that American Airlines will not transport shark fins.



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National News

CANADA:

Mako shark caught in Nova Scotia sea derby.

An 18 August 2015 article reported that during the fifth annual Petit de Grat sea derby, a participant landed a mako shark measuring 2.4 meters (eight feet) long and weighing 108 kilograms (237 pounds). Mako sharks, both shortfin (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) and longfin (*I. paucus*), are listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

National News



CHINA:

Survey shows increased awareness and decreased demand for shark fin soup.

A [16 April](#) and [17 April 2015 article](#) reported that 70% of Hong Kong residents have reduced or ceased consumption of shark fin soup over the past five years. 90% of surveyed residents supported both a ban on the sale of products that contribute to killing threatened species and increased regulation of the international shark trade. 84% agreed that human activities threaten sharks.



Study recommends better trade data to improve shark conservation.

A study published in the April 2015 issue of *Biological Conservation* reviewed global production and trade data for sharks as well as Chinese markets, found that shark fin capture production has peaked in China but that existing regulatory measures are insufficient to conserve shark species, and recommended stronger conservation strategies and better tracking of quantities of shark fins in trade.

COSTA RICA:

Shark fin shipments spark controversy.

A [24 April 2015 article](#) reported that on December 24th, an American Airlines plane en route from Costa Rica to Hong Kong, carrying 411 kilograms (904 pounds) of dried hammerhead shark fins (*Sphyrna zygaena* and *S. lewini*) valued at nearly \$53,000, touched down in Miami. The shipment contained fins from around 411 animals, more than seven times the number on its export permit from the Costa Rican government. The scalloped hammerhead population is protected under the Endangered Species Act, but the U.S. failed to intercept the shipments.

A [27 May 2015 article](#) reported that after giving the green light to export shark fins to Hong Kong, the Costa Rican Ministry of the Environment received significant backlash, which led the government to suspend further issuance of hammerhead shark fin export permits until they could produce appropriate non-detriment findings.

Hammerheads need protection.

A [3 June 2015 article](#) reported that the Costa Rican Ministry of the Environment allowed the export of 239 kilograms of hammerhead fins, claiming “social interest,” even though coastal communities do not benefit from shark landings, which are detrimental to the species. Between 2009 and 2014, national and international fleets landed 60,320 hammerhead sharks in Costa Rica, a concerning number.

National News

ECUADOR:

New project uses genetic techniques to identify sharks.

On 28-29 April 2015 in Manta, Ecuador, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and the Government of Ecuador held the first CITES Shark DNA workshop in Ecuador to train officials to identify sharks using genetic techniques. These techniques will help the country increase its capacity to implement the CITES requirements for sharks.

Officials seize 200,000 shark fins.

A 28 May 2015 article reported that police in Manta, Ecuador seized 200,000 shark fins worth \$1.5 million and arrested six people, charging them with damaging wildlife.



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INDIA:

Scientists draw up action plan to save sharks.

A 1 July 2015 article reported that the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) issued a new report, *Guidance on National Plan of Action for Sharks in India*. 160 known species of sharks reside in India's commercial fishing zone, including Requiem, Hammerhead, thresher, Mackerel, Bamboo, and Hound sharks. Bycatch, overfishing, and low reproductive rates contribute to the decline and threaten the sharks' recovery. The plan calls for strengthening fishery databases, research, coordination among stakeholder groups, and existing regulatory measure.



NOAA

JAPAN:

On 18 May 2015, MOL Liner, the largest global shipping fleet, reaffirmed its ban on the shipment of shark fins, including products, raw materials, or processed materials made from fins.



Southwest Fisheries Science Center, NOAA Fisheries Service

National News

MALAYSIA:

Penang state government bans shark fin soup at official functions.

A [15 June 2015 article](#) reported that the Penang state government has banned shark fin soup at official functions with immediate effect. Though private companies are not affected, the Penang State Welfare, Caring Society and Environment Committee chairman, Phee Boon Poh, said private companies would be encouraged not to serve the dish if possible. He said the resolution was made in support of the World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Save Our Seafood campaign.

PALAU:

Officials catch and burn four poaching vessels.

A [12 June 2015 article](#) reported that Palau burned four Vietnamese boats found poaching in its waters. In the past year, the country has seized fifteen poaching vessels full of illegally fished sharks, including fins, and other valuable marine species.

SEYCHELLES:

Seychelles launches new hammerhead study.

A [6 May 2015 article](#) reported that in response to the CITES hammerhead listings, Seychelles will collect data, including data for different types of fishing practices, on scalloped hammerheads throughout the year, focusing on the breeding season. The project will use tissue samples to analyze DNA and assess the population with the goal of ensuring effective fishing regulations.

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UNITED KINGDOM:

Illegally imported shark fins seized at London restaurant.

A [19 April 2015 article](#) reported that officials seized and destroyed a stockpile of shark fins at the Royal China Club. The London restaurant had offered shark fin soup as an exotic off menu dish.

UNITED STATES:

More measures needed to conserve sharks.

A [7 September 2015 article](#) reported that while trade in shark fins has declined, trade in shark meat has increased 42% since 2000, the same year shark finning was federally banned in the U.S. Even after the fins attached rule, the U.S. legally exported around 84,000 lbs. of shark fins in 2011 and ranked fifth worldwide in the number of sharks, rays, and skates caught. In addition to recent private bans on the shipment of fins such as that declared by UPS, improved data collection and reporting is needed to track trade and to conserve sharks, rays, and skates.

International News

On 13 April 2015, in Doha, Qatar, during the 13th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the CITES Secretariat co-hosted an International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime event, calling on States to use the same enforcement efforts and penalties to combat wildlife and forest crime as other organized crimes.

A 3 June 2015 article reported that IUCN assessed Europe's 1,220 marine species and found that 7.5% are at risk of extinction. 40% of Europe's sharks and rays are threatened with extinction due to overfishing and bycatch.

In June/July 2015, to celebrate CITES' 40th anniversary of entry into force (which coincides with the release of the movie Jaws) on 1 July 1975, the CITES Secretariat issued two new publications to further the conservation of sharks, a booklet on implementing the CITES shark listings and a digital leaflet summarizing the recent capacity assessment study.

In July 2015, with the help of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the United Nations Programme for the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Gulf Elasmobranch Project published an identification guide for sharks in the Middle East in English and Arabic.

Shark ID Materials

See published Shark ID Guides for South America – Atlantic; South America – Pacific; Mexico, Central America and the Pacific; Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

CITES additional identification materials on sharks.

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Useful Websites

[Species Survival Network](#)

[CITES](#)

[CITES Sharks & Manta Rays](#)

[IUCN Red List](#)

[Convention on Migratory Species \(CMS\)](#)

[International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas \(ICCAT\)](#)

[Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission \(IATTC\)](#)

[Indian Ocean Tuna Commission \(IOTC\)](#)

[Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission \(WCPFC\)](#)

[Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna \(CCSBT\)](#)