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## **OCEANA CALLS FOR PROTECTION OF OCEAN'S TOP PREDATORS AT UPCOMING INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES MEETING**

### **Global demand for sharks and bluefin tuna driving populations towards extinction**

Oceana, the world's largest international ocean conservation organization, is calling for the protection of the ocean's top predators at the 17<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in Paris, France, November 17 to 27. Specifically, Oceana is seeking protections for several vulnerable and overexploited species vital to maintaining healthy oceans, including sharks, bluefin tuna, swordfish and sea turtles.

*"The demand for sharks and bluefin tuna is driving populations towards extinction,"* said Dr. Michael Hirshfield, senior vice president for North America and chief scientist at Oceana. *"The depletion of sharks and bluefin tuna is the result of decades of neglect by fisheries managers. Without immediate and proper international management, we will empty the oceans of these top predators and vastly change the oceans as we know them today."*

Each year, tens of millions of sharks are killed to satisfy the demand for shark fin soup throughout Asia, where a single fin can be sold for more than \$1,300. Today, more than half of the highly migratory oceanic sharks are considered overexploited or depleted, and some shark populations have declined by as much as 99 percent. Despite this unacceptable situation, managers have all but ignored their responsibilities for these top predators in our oceans.

Oceana is calling on ICCAT to implement the following protections for sharks:

- Prohibit the capture of endangered and vulnerable species, including hammerhead, oceanic whitetip and common thresher sharks;
- Establish science-based, precautionary catch limits for other commonly caught species in ICCAT fisheries, including shortfin mako and blue sharks; and
- Improve the ICCAT shark finning ban by requiring sharks to be landed whole, with their fins still naturally attached

*"ICCAT has a responsibility to manage sharks in the Atlantic Ocean,"* said Dr. Hirshfield. *"Yet ICCAT only has specific management measures in place for one shark species. The science and the law require ICCAT to do more to protect sharks."*

The human appetite for sushi and sashimi has also created a market where a single bluefin tuna can be sold for more than \$170,000. In recent decades both Western and Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna populations have been reduced significantly.

Oceana urges ICCAT to suspend the bluefin tuna fishery until a system can be put into place that follows the scientific advice on catch levels, stops illegal fishing and protects bluefin tuna spawning areas in the Gulf of Mexico and Mediterranean.

*"Bluefin tuna populations currently represent only a fraction of their historic levels," said Dr. Hirshfield. "Ineffective management and illegal fishing are responsible for the destruction of bluefin tuna populations worldwide. In light of the recent Deepwater Horizon oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, the only spawning area for the Western Atlantic bluefin, a precautionary management approach is more necessary than ever before."*

Oceana is also encouraging ICCAT to implement protections for swordfish and sea turtles. Protections for swordfish in the Mediterranean should include a minimum landing size, scientifically-based catch levels, incidental catch mitigation measures for undersized swordfish and sea turtles, and sanctions for countries using illegal driftnets. ICCAT should also protect sea turtles by putting mandatory measures in place to reduce sea turtle bycatch and requiring sea turtle interactions to be reported.

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*Oceana campaigns to protect and restore the world's oceans. Our team of marine scientists, economists, lawyers and other collaborators are achieving specific changes in the legislation to reduce pollution and prevent the irreversible collapse of fish stocks, protect marine mammals and other forms of marine life. With a global perspective and devoted to conservation, Oceana has offices in Europe, North America, South America and Central America. Over 400,000 collaborators and cyber activists in 150 countries have already joined Oceana. For more information, visit [www.oceana.org](http://www.oceana.org)*