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ICCAT SAYS “I CAN’T”

Oceana Calls ICCAT Meeting Massive Failure for Bluefin Tuna and Swordfish, Modest Progress for Sharks and Sea Turtles

As the 17th Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) closed today in Paris, France, Oceana, the world’s largest international ocean conservation organization called it a “massive failure for bluefin tuna and swordfish, with only modest progress for sharks and sea turtles.”

“Despite the flowery rhetoric, it was ‘business as usual’ for ICCAT,” said Dr. Michael Hirshfield, chief scientist and head-of-delegation for Oceana. *“It’s clear that countries didn’t come to Paris ready to conserve the species they are responsible for. As the world watched, ICCAT said ‘I Can’t.’”*

ICCAT CAN’T:

- end industrial fishing, and set and enforce catch limits to restore bluefin tuna populations;
- prevent breeding bluefin tuna from being caught while spawning;
- manage swordfish in the Mediterranean at all; and
- conserve sharks unless they are almost extinct

Bluefin Tuna

Although both the western and eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna populations are seriously depleted, ICCAT failed to establish sufficient protections to restore them.

While ICCAT reduced the allowed catch for eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna to 12,900 tonnes, this four percent reduction is almost laughable. Furthermore, ICCAT failed completely to take action to establish spawning ground sanctuaries, a basic and much-needed management measure. Oceana supports a closure of the bluefin tuna fishery until a system is in place that follows scientific advice on catch levels, ensures stock recovery, stops illegal fishing, and protects bluefin tuna spawning areas in the Gulf of Mexico and Mediterranean Sea.

“This trivial quota reduction is a political decision, not a science-based one,” said María José Cornax, fisheries campaigns manager for Oceana. *“Without an industrial fishing closure, it actually encourages illegal fishing and fails to ensure stock recovery. This political outcome is not good for the fish or the fisherman, and will certainly result in further stock depletion.”*

“It’s business as usual for the western bluefin stock as well,” said Hirshfield. *“A token quota cut here, a call to investigate identification of spawning areas there—nothing has changed. In the meantime, the stock remains at dangerously low levels of abundance.”*



© OCEANA/ Keith Ellenbogen.
Bluefin tuna in fattening cage,



© OCEANA/ Carlos Suárez. Illegal
driftnetter catching swordfish.



© OCEANA/ LX. Blue sharks in
the port of Ondarroa, Spain.

Malta.

Swordfish

Oceana was also disappointed that ICCAT failed to follow-through on its 2009 commitment to establish a “more comprehensive long-term management plan” for Mediterranean swordfish by 2010. Mediterranean swordfish populations have declined substantially in the last twenty years and many swordfish continue to be caught before they have had a chance to spawn even once. Despite this unacceptable situation, the fishery remains essentially unmanaged and uncontrolled.

Sharks

Ironically, those species with the least commercial value received the most protection this year—or perhaps for that reason. Oceana appreciates ICCAT’s decisions to protect oceanic whitetip, hammerhead and shortfin mako sharks. ICCAT member countries agreed to a total prohibition on keeping or selling any oceanic whitetip sharks caught in the Atlantic Ocean and a prohibition on keeping or selling hammerhead sharks caught in ICCAT fisheries. The hammerhead measure, which includes all species of hammerhead sharks in the Atlantic except bonnethead, contains an exemption for hammerheads caught by coastal developing nations for local consumption. Oceanic whitetips have declined by more than 99 percent in the Gulf of Mexico and hammerheads have declined by more than 99 percent in the Mediterranean. Also today, countries with fishermen who catch shortfin mako sharks will now have an additional reason to submit catch data - countries that do not submit data by 2013 will be prohibited from catching mako sharks at all.

“Before today, only one shark species was protected by ICCAT; today we are happy to have eight,” said Elizabeth Griffin Wilson, marine scientist and fisheries campaign manager at Oceana. *“Sharks are finally beginning to get the attention and protection they deserve.”*

Earlier this week, Oceana released a [new report](#) that estimates that more than 1.3 million highly migratory sharks were caught in the Atlantic Ocean during 2008, without international fisheries management. Oceana believes 1.3 million sharks to be a gross underestimate of the true mortality due to data underreporting in ICCAT. Scientific estimates based on Hong Kong shark fin trade data have shown that real shark catches in the Atlantic may be more than three times higher than what is reported to ICCAT. Oceana urges ICCAT to take more aggressive action in the future to manage sharks appropriately, in particular the establishment of catch limits.

Sea Turtles

Oceana applauds ICCAT’s decision to establish protections for sea turtles. Specifically, ICCAT approved a proposal to require data reporting on the capture of sea turtles in the Atlantic Ocean and mandated the use of hook-removal and fishing line disentanglement gear, which could save tens of thousands of sea turtles accidentally caught in ICCAT fisheries. Scientists estimate that between 240,000 and 350,000 sea turtles are caught in longline fisheries in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea each year.

[More information about bluefin tuna, sharks and swordfish](#)

[Photographs and video available upon request](#)

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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