



**For Immediate Release
November 27, 2010**

Contact: Dave Bard,
+1 202.486.4426 (U.S. mobile),
+33.61.076.7156 (local Paris mobile)
dbard@pewtrusts.org

Pew: Governments Incapable of Managing Tuna
Shark protections important, but not enough

PARIS – Dr. Susan Lieberman, director of international policy for the Pew Environment Group, issued this statement today in response to decisions made at this year’s meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

“ICCAT member governments today adopted measures to protect oceanic whitetip and hammerhead sharks, but were unable to provide real protection for Atlantic bluefin tuna and several other species of sharks whose populations are in jeopardy. Denying critical protection for some of the most threatened and iconic fish in the ocean is inexcusable.

“Despite sound science to show how threatened these species are—and all the recent evidence of fraud, laundering and illegal fishing—Atlantic bluefin tuna once again were denied the protection they desperately need. ICCAT member governments had more than enough information to act decisively. They failed to do so.

“They failed to protect the spawning grounds for Atlantic bluefin, either in the Gulf of Mexico or the Mediterranean. They failed to suspend, or even significantly reduce, this fishery until effective management measures are in place and illegal fishing is brought under control. They agreed to only minor reductions in Atlantic bluefin catch limits in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean, while adopting only cosmetic efforts to promote enforcement and compliance.

“Japan, the United States, the European Union and other member governments had an opportunity to secure meaningful protection for bluefin tuna this week. The inability of ICCAT member governments to make significant decisions to improve the health of Atlantic bluefin tuna and shark populations reflects the failure of a system that was set up largely by fishing countries on behalf of fishing interests.

“It is now clear that the entire management system of high seas fisheries is flawed and inadequate. The time for letting the fox guard the hen house is over; we call upon governments that care about healthy ocean ecosystems to overhaul this broken system.”

High definition b-roll and high resolution photos of Atlantic bluefin and sharks can be accessed online at www.pewenvironment.org/ICCAT.

The Pew Environment Group is the conservation arm of The Pew Charitable Trusts, a

nongovernmental organization that applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life. For more information, go to www.pewenvironment.org/ICCAT.

###

BACKGROUND

- The 17th Special Meeting for the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) concluded late Saturday, November 27, after days of closed-door negotiations to agree to catch limits and conservation measures for the western and eastern Atlantic (Mediterranean) bluefin tuna. Catch limits were ultimately set at 12,900 metric tons for the Mediterranean fishery and 1,750 metric tons for the West.
- In Paris, ICCAT countries failed to protect the spawning grounds for Atlantic bluefin tuna, either in the Gulf of Mexico or the Mediterranean. Japan and other countries achieved additional enforcement and compliance measures, in order to address the rampant illegal fishing and extensive black market in bluefin tuna, but these efforts are meaningless and cosmetic unless the population recovers.
- In October, the European Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Maria Damanaki, proposed cutting the Mediterranean quota of bluefin tuna to 6,000 tons, which would have given the population a greater chance of rebuilding by 2022. This proposal was ultimately overturned, with the EU saying it was now “taking into consideration the interests of the tuna fishermen.” EU Member States agreed to a negotiating mandate at ICCAT which was not based on the recommendation of the European Commission. The United States called for a reduction in quotas in both the eastern and western fisheries at the beginning of ICCAT and ultimately agreed to a minimal reduction of 50 tons for the western Atlantic population.
- In March 2010, Atlantic bluefin tuna was proposed for listing under Appendix I under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Despite support from the United States and the European Union, the proposal was brought down by intense lobbying from Japan, who stated that ICCAT, not CITES, was the relevant body to manage the fishery. Japan staked its reputation on achieving meaningful measures for bluefin at ICCAT and is now going home empty handed.
- While protection secured at this year’s ICCAT meeting will help Atlantic populations of oceanic whitetips and all species of Atlantic hammerheads (except for bonnethead shark, *Sphyrna tiburo*), ICCAT members had the opportunity to agree to other strong proposals that would have significantly improved management and conservation for other species of sharks including porbeagle and common thresher. Measures were agreed that bans retention of any oceanic whitetip sharks and for almost all hammerhead sharks in the Atlantic. Developing coastal countries may have coastal fisheries for domestic consumption, but international trade of fins is prohibited. The measure agreed on shortfin mako is a restatement of data collection requirements that were already decided in 2004.
- Deciding on conservation or management measures for just a few shark species per year is no way to protect these vulnerable animals. ICCAT also did not reach consensus on a proposal that would have improved the effectiveness of the current finning ban by requiring that all sharks are landed with their fins naturally attached to the body.
- Sharks are clearly different from most bony fish in terms of productivity with their unusually low reproductive rates and extreme vulnerability to overfishing. To put

this in terms of those familiar with ICCAT's history, a shortfin mako that was born 18 years ago in 1993, while ICCAT was meeting in Spain, will just now be close to reaching reproductive maturity and may give birth to only three to 18 pups at some point between the 2011 and 2012 meetings.

- More than half of the shark species taken in high-seas fisheries are classified as *Endangered*, *Vulnerable* or *Near Threatened* by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Up to 73 million sharks are killed annually to support the global shark fin trade.
- Conservation groups are calling for increased transparency at ICCAT and other fisheries meetings. Press must be allowed to attend the meeting and conservation organizations should be required to participate in working groups, as a shift away from closed-door sessions that characterize these meetings.
- Last month, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) [published the results of a seven-month-long inquiry](#) into ICCAT member nations' management of bluefin stocks in the Mediterranean. ICIJ revealed waste, fraud, and rampant mismanagement in the reporting of bluefin catch totals, resulting in a \$4 billion black market in bluefin tuna between 1998 and 2007.