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NATIONAL  
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ADMINISTRATION

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### **INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ADOPTS U.S. PROPOSAL FOR SHARK FINNING BAN**

Sixty-three countries unanimously adopted historic and unprecedented protective measures for Atlantic sharks during the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas. Led by NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the United States delegation pushed for and won a consensus agreement. The meeting concluded Sunday in New Orleans. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

“This agreement is what we needed to ensure the survival of Atlantic sharks,” said William Hogarth, director of NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. government commissioner to ICCAT. “American fishermen have been adhering to strict regulations for sharks, and this action will level the regulatory arena so all nations can contribute to shark conservation.”

After a week of deliberations, ICCAT adopted the U.S. proposal to ban the wasteful practice of shark finning – slicing the fin off the shark and discarding the carcass to save space on a fishing vessel. The United States has long condemned shark finning, which threatens future food security in many countries as well as the delicate balance of marine ecosystems. The United States banned finning in the Atlantic in 1993, and this binding agreement will require other countries fishing in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean to do the same.

“This decision signals that the international community is ready and willing to join the United States in managing sharks for long-term sustainability,” Hogarth said. “All fishing nations recognize the importance and value of healthy shark populations, and we are pleased that our international partners share our goal of preventing further decline of sharks and rebuilding depleted stocks.”

This historic agreement comes just days after the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution urging nations to work together through regional fisheries management organizations to manage sharks. It includes adoption of additional shark management practices already in place in the United States, such as data collection on catches of sharks, research on shark nursery areas and a provision to encourage the release of live sharks, especially juveniles. Co-sponsors of the shark proposal included Canada, the European Community, Japan, Mexico, Panama, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela.

ICCAT also adopted important measures for other species and addressed additional issues:

### **Bluefin Tuna**

Another priority for the United States this year was to seek integrated management of bluefin tuna in the eastern and western Atlantic. Countries fishing in the eastern area agreed to adopt a higher minimum size with no tolerance, a significant step for the protection of juvenile bluefin in the Mediterranean – bringing them closer to conservation steps already taken in the United States. Japan will host a meeting in April to discuss integrated management of bluefin tuna and issues relating to bluefin tuna farming.

### **Bigeye Tuna**

ICCAT adopted a multi-year total allowable catch for bigeye tuna, including allocations for major players with payback provisions for past overharvests. There are some concerns about changes to a time/area closure in the Gulf of Guinea that could weaken protection for juvenile bigeye. However, ICCAT will conduct a scientific review of the closure on 2005 and recommend other alternatives to protect juvenile bigeye. The United States is a relatively minor player in this fishery; nonetheless, this species is very important to U.S. recreational and commercial fishermen.

### **Marlin**

Conservation measures that are part of Phase I of the rebuilding plan for white marlin and blue marlin were extended through 2006. This extension was very important to the United States as it will allow NOAA to complete Congressionally funded research on marlin and have the results available for the next stock assessments in 2006.

### **Driftnets**

In response to direction given by the Commission at last year's meeting, Morocco presented a four-year plan for eliminating the use of driftnets in their fisheries, through public education and assistance to fishermen. The United States highlighted the urgency of this action and offered to work with Morocco to help them expedite the implementation of this plan.

### **Vessel Monitoring Systems**

ICCAT members agreed to implement a requirement to have vessel monitoring systems onboard large-scale longline vessels by November 1, 2005. This requirement has already been implemented in the United States.

### **Addressing Non-cooperation with Existing Agreements**

In light of compliance problems with vessels from Taiwan, including insufficient monitoring and control, ICCAT took the first step toward implementing trade sanctions against Taiwan. A similar step was taken toward Singapore, which in spite of being the world's largest importer and re-exporter of swordfish, has refused to adopt ICCAT's swordfish trade tracking scheme. Taiwan and Singapore must take corrective action before next year's ICCAT meeting if they wish to avoid further steps toward punitive action by the Commission.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

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On the Web:

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Services: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>