



**COMMISSION**  
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**Joint Statement on Blue Sharks for WCPFC20**

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**WCPFC20-2023-OP17**  
**4 December 2023**

Sharkproject

Dec. 1, 2023

**Statement from Wild Oceans, Oceana, and Sharkproject**  
20th Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

Blue sharks are top predators and play a vital role in the health and resilience of marine ecosystems. However, they are at high risk of overfishing in all oceans, primarily due to their significant overlap with industrial longline fisheries operations and their inherently lower reproductive rates compared to tunas and other target species. Over the past 50 years, the North Pacific Blue shark stock has seen substantial shifts over the Kobe plot<sup>1</sup>, and the Pacific Ocean accounts for the majority of the global blue shark catch.<sup>2</sup>

As conservation organizations, we are concerned about the continued overexploitation of blue sharks without adequate and suitable management critical for ensuring long-term sustainability. We call on the Commission to fulfill its mandate<sup>3</sup> to sustainably manage all “highly migratory fish stocks” of the species listed in Annex 1 of the 1982 Convention<sup>4</sup> occurring in the Convention Area, including shark species, and apply a precautionary approach to the management of both blue shark stocks.

Specifically, we urge the Commission to take the following steps in 2023:

- task the Scientific Committee and International Scientific Committee with developing, by 2024, Limit Reference Points for the North Pacific and South Pacific blue shark stocks that are at least as precautionary as those for target tuna species.<sup>5</sup> Accepting a higher risk for vulnerable sharks is not scientifically justified in view of their high biological susceptibility<sup>6</sup> to overfishing and their important trophic role in the ecosystem that depends on healthy stocks.
- create a plan to develop and implement comprehensive management procedures for blue shark.
- increase observer coverage in longline fleets to 30% coverage via human and/or electronic monitoring now and strive towards 100% coverage in the mid to long term.<sup>7</sup>
- work through the Technical and Compliance Committee to ensure compliance with WCPFC’s reporting requirements for sharks, including full reporting of discards as required by WCPFC CMM 2013-05 and CMM-2022-06.<sup>8</sup>

We further join WWF, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and The Ocean Foundation in their calls to improve the monitoring and reporting of at-sea fishing and transshipment activities, to Extend the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) and to strengthen CMM-2017-02.

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<sup>1</sup> [WCPFC-SC18-2022/SA-WP-06](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Blue Shark: Economic valuation of the global market for blue shark products and interdependent policy analysis for sustainable management and trade, Poseidon, December 2022](#)

<sup>3</sup> [WCPFC Convention Text](#)

<sup>4</sup> [UNCLOS Annex I](#)

<sup>5</sup> [SC19 Summary Report WCPFC20-2023-SC19](#)

<sup>6</sup> [IATTC DOCUMENT SAC-13-11](#)

<sup>7</sup> We note that SC19 has recommended expanding longline observer coverage to improve the quality of SC data, and TCC19 also affirmed the importance of increasing observer coverage. See [WCPFC20-2023-21](#).

<sup>8</sup> [Scientific Data to be Provided to the Commission](#)

While tuna stocks and many other species are increasingly subject to comprehensive management procedures, similar measures are still absent for commercially exploited blue sharks despite their critical role in the ecosystem and importance in the commercially lucrative shark trade.<sup>2,9, 10</sup> WCPFC has previously pioneered the adoption of measures to protect sharks, including banning use of shark lines and wire leaders and implementing retention bans for oceanic whitetip sharks and silky sharks. WCPFC-CMM-22-04 notes “for longline fisheries targeting sharks, CCMs shall develop and report their management plans in their Part 2 Annual Report”. WCPFC has the competency to manage these stocks, yet, to date no management strategies have been adopted by WCPFC to ensure long-term sustainability of heavily targeted and economically valuable species such as blue sharks.

Although 2022 stock assessments in the [Northern](#) and [Southern](#) Pacific have concluded that at this time blue sharks are likely not overfished or experiencing overfishing, there is substantial uncertainty in the assessment data.<sup>11,14</sup> Considering the extremely low observer coverage in longline fleets of only 5% and the poor compliance with reporting obligations for discards<sup>11</sup>, the total removals of blue sharks in the Convention area remain highly uncertain. This data-poor situation calls for prudent foresight and conservative action that safeguards blue shark stocks.

## Background

The results of the most recent blue shark stock assessments show that the time is ripe to develop precautionary management procedures that will maintain the stock in the green quadrant and prevent the need for future reactionary measures.

- The [2022 stock assessment](#) indicated a 61.9% probability of the **North Pacific stock** being in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot (i.e. not overfished and not subject to overfishing). Future projections showed that while SSB will likely (>50% probability) increase at current harvest levels, harvesting at FMSY will decrease SSB below SSBMSY.<sup>12, 13</sup> It was noted that catch estimates were often uncertain; that the model ensemble did not consider some key uncertainties, in particular natural mortality or stock-recruitment steepness; and that projection results could be overly optimistic if the noted low recruitment continues into the future.<sup>11</sup>
- The [2022 assessment](#), in which the [stock assessment of 2017](#) was further analyzed due to significant uncertainties, suggested that the **South Pacific stock** may be in a state of recovery, and that at the end of the assessment period  $F_{\text{recent}}$  was below  $F_{\text{MSY}}$  and in many models  $SB_{\text{recent}}$  above  $SB_{\text{MSY}}$ . The SC concluded that the Southwest Pacific stock is unlikely to be overfished and unlikely to be experiencing overfishing. However, it was noted that “substantial uncertainties about inputs and biological parameters remain”.<sup>14,15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [SC19-EB-WP-09](#)

<sup>10</sup> ICCAT has adopted TACs for blue sharks and agreed on allocation of catch quotas, and in 2023 committed to evaluating development of a management framework for blue sharks by 2025 ([ICCAT 21-11](#), [ICCAT 2023 Meeting Press Release](#))

<sup>11</sup> [ISC22 Plenary Report](#)

<sup>12</sup> [SC18-SA-WP-06](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Stock Status and Conservation Information \(From ISC22 Plenary Report\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> [SC18-SA-WP-03](#)

<sup>15</sup> [WCPFC South Pacific Blue Shark Stock Assessment](#)