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SAI Position Statement to WCPFC 13” by “Shark Advocates International

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**Submitted by
Shark Advocates International**



POSITION STATEMENT
SHARK & RAY CONSERVATION MEASURES
13th Regular Session of the
WESTERN & CENTRAL PACIFIC FISHERIES COMMISSION
Denarau Island, Fiji, December 5-9, 2016

Our organizations appreciate delegates' consideration of our views on proposals currently before the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) with respect to the conservation of sharks and rays. We focus on these species because of the low reproductive capacity that leaves most of them exceptionally vulnerable to overexploitation.

EU PROPOSAL ON MOBULID RAYS

Manta and devil rays (family Mobulidae) are the least fecund fish taken in tuna fisheries, with females giving birth to as few as one pup every two to three years. A particularly cautious approach is warranted with respect to both handling of individuals and management of fishing mortality. With all mobulid rays now listed on Appendix I and II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), Parties' intentions and obligations to safeguard these particularly vulnerable species are mounting. Specifically, CMS Parties are required to strictly protect mobulids while CITES Parties are obligated to restrict international manta ray trade to that which can be demonstrated to be the result of sustainable and legal fishing through non-detriment findings.

We strongly support the EU's proposal aimed at safe, live release of manta and devil rays, and urge Parties to agree (accordingly) to prohibit retention, landing, sale, storage, and transshipment as well as harmful practices (gaffing, lifting by gill slits or spiracles, punching holes in wings), mandate prompt and careful release according to safe handling guidelines, ensure that numbers of discarded and released mobulids as well as their status are recorded and reported to the WCPFC, and add mobulid rays as WCPFC "key shark species" for assessment, etc.

EU PROPOSAL ON SHARK FINNING

We applaud the EU for leadership toward prohibiting at-sea shark fin removal, the best practice for enforcing bans on shark finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea). Such "fins-attached" policies can ease enforcement, improve species-specific catch data, and prevent high-grading. EU fishermen are using this method for frozen as well as fresh sharks. Concerns about safety and storage can be addressed by partially cutting and folding fins against the body. Because of its many practical advantages, the fins-attached method is being mandated in a growing number of countries, and is gaining acceptance in international arenas; the policy was adopted by the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission and the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (in 2014 and 2016, respectively), and supported by 80% of Parties to the International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas last month.

We urge Parties to adopt a prohibition on the removal of shark fins on-board vessels, as well as the retention, transshipment, and landing of shark fins that are not naturally attached to carcasses, *without exceptions*.

Shark Advocates International, a project of The Ocean Foundation, works to safeguard sharks & rays through sound, science-based conservation policy.

Supporting work in more than 35 countries, Humane Society International is one of the only international organizations working to protect all animals.

The Shark Trust is a UK charity working to advance the worldwide conservation of sharks through science, education, influence and action.

Project AWARE Foundation is a growing movement of scuba divers protecting the ocean planet – one dive at a time.