



## Joint Statement to the 28th Session of the IOTC in Support of Prop V, including Management Procedures for Blue Sharks

Indian Ocean tuna fisheries and coastal communities are dependent on healthy marine ecosystems. As key predatory species, sharks are of vital importance for the marine ecosystems and therefore of economic and cultural importance in the IOTC area of competence. However, many shark species are highly vulnerable to overfishing due to their biology and to the significant overlap of their spatial distribution with fishing activities, which results in three quarters of all pelagic shark and ray species now being rated as ‘*threatened*’ on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and half of them are already ‘*critically endangered*’ or ‘*endangered*’ by extinction<sup>1</sup> due to industrial fishing activities over the last 50 years.

The status of shark populations in the Indian Ocean is worse than in other oceans and continues to deteriorate.<sup>2</sup> Most IOTC CPCs fail to comply with required reporting of species-level data, confounding stock assessments for Indian Ocean sharks.

Blue sharks account for more than 60% of global shark catches with annual estimated IOTC catches of almost 50,000 tonnes<sup>3</sup>. Resolution 18/02 required the Commission to consider, in 2021 the adoption of management measures for blue sharks, such as catch limits for each CPC. Resolution 18/02 also tasked the Scientific Committee to provide advice, if possible, on options for candidate limit, threshold, and target reference points for this species. However, there has been no additional action from either the Scientific Committee or Commission since the 2021 assessment.

While blue sharks are less susceptible to overfishing than most other pelagic shark species such as oceanic whitetip, silky sharks, or shortfin mako sharks it is still important to recognise that they are a shark species and therefore intrinsically more vulnerable to overfishing than tuna species or most other commercially fished species. Blue sharks are rated globally as ‘near threatened’ by the IUCN and the IOTC Scientific Committee advised in 2021 that maintaining current catches of blue sharks is likely to result in decreasing biomass and the stock becoming overfished and subject to overfishing in the near future.

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<sup>1</sup> Pacoureau, N., Rigby, C.L., Kyne, P.M. et al. Half a century of global decline in oceanic sharks and rays. *Nature* 589, 567–571 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-03173-9>

<sup>2</sup> Boris Worm et al. .Global shark fishing mortality still rising despite widespread regulatory change. *Science* 383, 225-230 (2024). DOI:10.1126/science.adf8984

<sup>3</sup> [https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/content/Stock\\_status/2023/Blue\\_shark\\_ES\\_2023.pdf](https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/content/Stock_status/2023/Blue_shark_ES_2023.pdf)

While tuna stocks and other species are now subject to comprehensive management procedures, similar measures have not yet been adopted for commercially exploited blue sharks despite their economic importance. This long overdue omission should be urgently addressed.

As conservation organisations, we are concerned about the potential overexploitation of blue sharks, commercially fished without effective conservation and management measures in place to ensure that the stock will be maintained with a high probability within the green quadrant of the Kobe plot into the future.

We therefore highly welcome PropV that calls on the Commission in 2024 to adopt a comprehensive shark management measure to instate many welcome mandates and initiatives, including:

- *“the Commission shall consider at its 2025 meeting the adoption of specific conservation and management measures for blue sharks, including a total allowable catch, catch limits for each CPC to be decided taking into account the most recent reported catch information.”*
- Task the IOTC Scientific Committee to provide inter alia recommendations to the Commission on ways to strengthen the conservation and management of sharks within IOTC, including *“options for candidate limit, threshold and target reference points for the conservation and management of sharks caught for commercial purposes and catch limits for each CPC for sharks caught for commercial purposes”*.

In addition, we call on the Commission to make this a priority for blue sharks and task the IOTC Scientific Committee to expand upon the reference point work and provide the Commission by 2025 with a tentative roadmap for developing a fully-tested management procedures including inter alia candidate HCRs for the management of blue sharks in the IOTC area of competence.

Furthermore, we highly appreciate the additional shark conservation and management measures proposed by Maldives and Pakistan, including:

- clear definitions of applicability of the measures;
- a requirement for the introduction of fins naturally attached - without exemptions – for all fleet segments and CPCs as also proposed by the Prop J
- improved compliance with mandatory reporting of shark removals at species level as required by Resolution 15/02 including discard estimates and discard status (dead or alive); and
- implementation of effective bycatch mitigation measures to reduce at board and post release mortality.

In particular we support the provision that *“starting on 1 January 2025, CPCs shall ensure that their flag long-line vessels do not:*

- a) use or carry wire trace as branch lines or leaders;*
- b) use branch lines running directly off the longline floats or drop lines, known as shark lines”*

in view of the widely demonstrated conservation benefit on reducing shark bycatch and also shark mortality which is also in line with the previous advice of the IOTC Scientific Committee which *“RECOMMENDED to the Commission that if it wishes to reduce catch rates of sharks by longliners it should prohibit the use of wire leaders/traces”*.