Press Release

**NGOs, industry and scientists call on Marine Stewardship Council to take urgent action on shark finning. Letter calls for urgent, ambitious action to stamp out and proactively prevent shark finning from certified fisheries in light of conservation status of sharks. Signatories urge MSC to implement ‘Fins Naturally Attached’ policy as a pre-requisite for certification in line with global best practice and to take steps to ensure compliance.**

A wide-ranging group of over 56 stakeholders spanning the industry, NGO sector and academia, including SHARKPROJECT International, Greenpeace International, EJF, Shark Allies, Wild Aid Hong Kong, OceanCare, Pro Wildlife, die Deutsche Stiftung Meeresschutz, Stop Finning, Professor Callum Roberts, Professor for Marine Conservation at the University of York, GB and the Swiss retailer Migros, have written to the MSC to express their concerns about the ongoing incidence of shark finning in MSC-certified fisheries and the MSC’s continued reluctance to implement globally acknowledged best practice to ensure this can no longer continue. This issue has already been addressed on several occasions with the MSC Board and in previously sent open letters in 2018 and 2019, signed by over 50 stakeholders. Therefore, this letter now calls for the Board to finally implement effective actions at its upcoming Board meeting.

The MSC is the world’s largest ecolabel and often considered the gold standard for sustainable seafood. However, various stakeholders have raised concerns about areas where they feel that the organisation needs to make improvements. With recent warnings that about 30% of all existing shark and ray species face extinction within the next decades, improved measures for the protection of sharks throughout all MSC-certified fisheries should be one such priority for the MSC’s Board of Trustees and in the upcoming Standard Review. According to Prof. Callum Roberts an estimated 100 million sharks are killed by people each year. Shark finning is a cruel practice, which also has devastating consequences for entire marine ecosystems, which are held in balance by these top predators. He concludes that such destructive practices should not be taking place, at any scale, in sustainable fisheries.

The MSC has banned shark finning since 2012, stating that fisheries engaged in finning are not eligible for certification. However, the letter highlights that official data demonstrates that this practice has continued in MSC-certified fisheries, as a result of substantial weaknesses in the MSC Standard.

The signatories point out that the solution presently proposed by the MSC – a two-year exclusion from the fishery for vessels following a successful prosecution for shark finning – is too weak, particularly given known low detection rates of finning and even lower prosecution rates. The letter highlights the signatories’ view that this will not prevent finning from happening without implementation of a Fins Naturally Attached policy as a prerequisite for fisheries to qualify for certification.

The letter urges the MSC Board to implement the following improvements and to do so at a much faster rate than the Standard Review:

* Fisheries with a high risk of interacting with sharks, as primary, secondary or ETP species, should be required to have a Fins Naturally Attached policy in place and have to demonstrate compliance with such a policy prior to certification. This should be mandatory to receive a score at SG60.
* External verification of compliance with the policy has to be demonstrated via a harmonised, risk-based minimum level of observer coverage and/or electronic surveillance.
* MSC must improve its technical oversight of certification bodies’ compliance with scoring requirements to ensure scoring is harmonised between these bodies and between all assessed fisheries within the same risk category.
* The MSC should actively promote and support introduction of a Fins Naturally Attached policy at all Regional Fishery Management Organisations (RFMOs) to facilitate and support fisheries in their attempts to achieve MSC certification.

Dr. Iris Ziegler, SHARKPROJECT International is very disappointed by the MSC’s reaction to the letter after its board meeting: "To say that the possible exclusion of individual fishing vessels as of September 2020 in the event of successful prosecution for finning is a stringent requirement for the elimination of “finning" completely contradicts reality. And the announced investigation of global implementation of a “fins naturally attached” requirement comes far too late. Even if this requirement should finally be introduced as part of the Standard Review, it will still take until 2030 until all fisheries have actually implemented it on the water. Another 10 years from now - that's far too late considering the situation in our oceans!”

Sharkproject International e.V., 10 February 2020

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**Background**

SHARKPROJECT International initiated the two previous letters on finning in MSC certified fisheries and is a founding member of the Make Stewardship Count Coalition (www.Make-Stewardship-Count.org), which currently has 90 members worldwide and wrote an open letter to the MSC in 2018, demanding critical improvements to the certification standard with regard to bycatch and the impact on the ecosystem. This objective has been pursued by the coalition ever since.