Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
Commission des Thons de l'Océan Indien
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ON THE CONSERVATION OF OCEANIC WHITETIP SHARKS (*CARCHARHINUS LONGIMANUS*) CAUGHT IN ASSOCIATION WITH IOTC MANAGED FISHERIES

SUBMITTED BY: EUROPEAN UNION, 05 APRIL 2013

Explanatory Memorandum

The international scientific community highlights that the oceanic whitetip shark: (a) has been ranked as one of the five shark' species with the highest degree of risk in an ecological risk assessment; (b) when caught, it has high survival rate at vessel and constitutes a small portion of the shark catch; (c) it is one of the easiest of shark species to identify; and (d) that a significant proportion of the species catch is composed of juveniles, justifying a precautionary approach in their management. It must be noted that while a minimum size length could be set to protect juveniles this may cause enforcement difficulties and might jeopardize the survival of the captured individuals.

In addition, the ecological risk assessment made by the IOTC Scientific Committee notes that the oceanic whitetip shark is one of the most vulnerable species in IOTC fisheries.

Furthermore, the increasing level of shark catches in the Indian Ocean may have an irreversible negative impact on the stock of the above mentioned species, justifying a precautionary approach in their management. As a result, fishing vessels should be prohibited from retaining on board, transshipping, landing, storing, selling or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of the above mentioned species.

The Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch recognized that full stock assessments on sharks may not be possible due to data limitations. It is therefore essential that appropriate data is collected, at least for the most vulnerable species in order to carry out a stock assessment.

In response to the Commission's request for more information on the technical aspects of IOTC Resolution 05/05 *Concerning the conservation of sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by IOTC*, and after several years of discussions and assessment on these aspects, the Scientific Committee clearly recommends that all sharks must be landed with fins attached to their respective carcass.

This management measure appears to be in response to concerns about the threats to shark populations from fishing and the practice of shark finning, in fact:

- The current percentage fins:body weight ratio requirement has no clear scientific basis as a conservation measure for sharks in the Indian Ocean, rather it appears to be aimed at slowing down the rate of fishing or to deter fishing on sharks by not allowing fins only to be landed and requiring vessels to return to port more often to unload fins and body parts;
- Maintaining the use of the fin:body weight ratios will preclude the collection of essential information on species level interactions with fishing fleets, crucial for accurate stock assessments for sharks;
- Current scientific evidence clearly indicates that percentage fins:body weight varies widely among species, fin types used in calculations, the type of carcass weight used (whole or dressed), and the method of processing used to remove the fins (fin cutting technique);
- The use of the ratio measure is unlikely to address any sustainability issues that might exist for particular species;
- The only way to guarantee that sharks are not finned (and full utilisation of sharks is encouraged) is to require that the trunks be landed with the fins attached.
- Considering these IOTC Scientific Committee's agreed conclusions, the European Union is proposing a new Resolution which aims at tackling the threats to shark populations from fishing and the practice of shark finning.

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RESOLUTION 13/XX
ON THE CONSERVATION OF OCEANIC WHITE TIP SHARKS (*CARCHARHINUS LONGIMANUS*) CAUGHT IN ASSOCIATION WITH IOTC MANAGED FISHERIES

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC),

RECALLING IOTC Resolution 05/05 *concerning the conservation of sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by IOTC*;

CONSIDERING that, oceanic whitetip sharks (*Carcharhinus longimanus)* are caught as bycatch in the IOTC area of competence;

NOTING that the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch recognized that full stock assessments on sharks may not be possible because of data limitations and that it is essential that some stock assessment evaluation should be carried out;

NOTING that the international scientific community points out that the oceanic whitetip sharks (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) are vulnerable to overfishing and that their abundance has declined significantly over recent decades;

NOTING that the ecological risk assessment made by the IOTC Scientific Committee recognises the oceanic whitetip sharks (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) as one of the most vulnerable species in IOTC fisheries;

BEARING IN MIND that oceanic whitetip sharks can be easily distinguished from other shark species and can therefore be released before they are taken on board of the vessel;

ADOPTS, in accordance with the provisions of Article IX, paragraph 1 of the IOTC Agreement, the following:

1. Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties (hereafter referred to as CPCs) shall prohibit fishing vessels flying their flag and operating in IOTC managed fisheries to retain on board, tranship, land or store any part or whole carcass of oceanic whitetip sharks (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) with the exception of paragraph 5.

2. CPCs shall require fishing vessels flying their flag to promptly release unharmed, to the extent practicable, of oceanic whitetip sharks (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) when brought alongside for taking onboard the vessel. However, CPCs should encourage their fishers to release this species if recognized on the line before bringing them on-board the vessels.

3. CPCs shall encourage their fishers to record incidental catches as well as live releases. These data shall be kept at the IOTC Secretariat.

4. CPCs shall, where possible, implement research on oceanic whitetip sharks (*Carcharhinus longimanus)* taken in the IOTC area of competence, in order to identify potential nursery areas. Based on this research, CPCs shall consider other measures, as appropriate.

5. Scientific observers shall be allowed to collect biological samples (vertebrae, tissues, reproductive tracts, stomachs, skin samples, spiral valves, jaws, whole and skeletonised specimens for taxonomic works and museum collections) from oceanic whitetip sharks (*Carcharhinus longimanus)* taken in the IOTC area of competence that are dead at haulback, provided that the samples are a part of a research project approved by the Scientific Committee/the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB). In order to obtain the approval, a detailed document outlining the purpose of the work, number of samples intended to be collected and the spatio-temporal distribution of the sampling effect must be included in the proposal. Annual progress of the work and a final report on completion shall be presented to the WPEB/Scientific Committee.

6. The CPCs, especially those targeting sharks, shall submit data for sharks, as required by IOTC data reporting procedures.