

Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/5+6+7**“ON THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF SHARKS AND RAYS IN THE WECAFC AREA”**

The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC):

RECALLING that the objective of the Commission is to promote the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources within the area of competence of the Commission, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and to address common problems of fisheries management and development faced by members of the Commission;

RECALLING that the FAO Committee on Fisheries in 1999 adopted an International Plan of Action for the Conservation and the Management of Sharks, which calls on States, within the framework of their respective competencies and consistent with international law, to cooperate through regional fisheries organizations with a view to ensuring the sustainability of shark stocks as well as to adopt and implement National Plans of Action for the conservation and management of sharks;

MINDFUL of the fact that fish belonging to the taxon Elasmobranchii, which includes sharks, skates, rays and similar species, are generally very vulnerable to overexploitation due to their life-cycle characteristics, and that scientific knowledge indicates that some stocks of sharks and rays in the Atlantic Ocean are declining.

RECOGNIZING the important contribution of the shark fisheries to food and nutrition security and the economic and social well-being of the people of the region, and the need therefore to implement appropriate conservation and management measures to ensure long-term sustainable use of the shark resources;

ACKNOWLEDGING the sharks and rays management and conservation measures taken already by other regional fisheries bodies with a mandate in the Atlantic Ocean, such as the International Commission For The Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), and the major efforts made by a range of WECAFC MEMBERS towards sharks and rays conservation;

NOTING the listing of various species in the CITES Appendices, as well as in those of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol), and the Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS);

FURTHER NOTING the importance of harmonizing conservation and management measures with other international and regional conventions for the sustainable management and conservation of these shark and ray species;

NOTING that shark finning has been prohibited by several Regional Fisheries Bodies and that on-board shark fin removal has been banned by the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), OSPESCA, as well as

several WECAFC MEMBERS individually, and that it is important to harmonize shark conservation measures and employ best practices to achieve an impact for these often pelagic, highly migratory species;

STRESSING that prohibiting the removal of shark fins on-board vessels and requiring that all sharks are landed with fins still naturally attached has long been widely recognized by MCS experts, as the most reliable and cost-effective method for enforcing finning bans;

RECALLING the outcomes of the 1st meeting of the WECAFC /CITES/OSPESCA/CRFM/CFMC Working Group on Shark Conservation and Management, which was held in Barbados on 17-19 October 2017;

PENDING the finalisation and endorsement of the final Regional Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks and Rays in the WECAFC Area;

ADOPTS in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes this **RECOMMENDATION** that:

1. WECAFC MEMBERS develop their NPOAs-Sharks in line with the IPOA-Sharks, in support of more effective conservation and management of sharks and rays in general .
2. WECAFC MEMBERS prohibit vessels flying their flag from retaining on board, transshipping, landing, trading shark and ray species, consistent with measures adopted, as appropriate, by ICCAT, and/or listed on Annex II of the Cartagena Convention Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol) and Appendix I of the Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS).
3. WECAFC MEMBERS ensure that incidental catches of the species covered by paragraph 2 as well as, other sharks and rays caught in association with WECAFC fisheries and are not used for commercial purposes or food and/or subsistence, are promptly released unharmed and alive and without removing the species from the water , to the extent possible, while ensuring safety of the crew. The species, number of specimens and status (alive, dead, uncertain) upon release should be reported.
4. WECAFC MEMBERS requests the SAG to liaise with SCRS of ICCAT in view to compiling available guidelines for handling and safe release of prohibited and unwanted sharks and rays caught in association with WECAFC fisheries.
5. WECAFC MEMBERS prohibit the removal of shark fins at sea and require that all sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached through the point of first landing of the sharks.

6. WECAFC MEMBERS prohibit the retention on board, transshipment, landing and selling of shark fins harvested in contravention of this measure.
7. Without prejudice to paragraph 5 of this Recommendation, in order to facilitate on-board storage, shark fins may be partially cut from the body and folded against the carcass, but shall not be removed from the carcass before the first landing.
8. WECAFC MEMBERS that are non-contracting parties to ICCAT are strongly encouraged to provide their estimates of landings and of live and dead discards of sharks, caught by vessels flying their flag , and all other available data including observer data, annually to WECAFC and ICCAT, as appropriate, to support the stock assessment process. The Members are encouraged to report catches of sharks by species, or to the lowest taxonomic level if species identification is not possible.
9. WECAFC MEMBERS, where possible, undertake research to identify ways to make fishing gears more selective with the aim to reducing by-catches or by-catch mortality of sharks.
10. WECAFC MEMBERS, where possible, conduct research on key biological, ecological, economic and trade parameters, life history and behavioural traits, migration patterns, as well as on the identification of potential mating, pupping and nursery grounds of the most common sharks species in the WECAFC area.
11. The WECAFC /CITES/OSPESCA/CRFM/CFMC Working Group on Shark Conservation and Management continues to collect, generate and share data and information on shark and rays caught in association with their fisheries, for the bi-annual meeting. The Working Group will include in its workplan the review of the stock status of the main commercially targeted sharks and rays stocks, and report on these matters to the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG).