

Prop. 12.36 (United Kingdom, on behalf of the European Union) List the basking shark on Appendix II.

SSN VIEW: Support Adoption of Proposal

- The basking shark meets the criteria for listing on Appendix II in accordance with Resolution Conf. 9.24, Annex 2(a), B(i) (“it is known, inferred or projected that the harvesting of specimens from the wild for international trade has, or may have, a detrimental impact on the species by exceeding, over an extended period, the level that can be continued in perpetuity”).
- The species also meets the criteria in Annex 1, C(i) and (ii) (“a decline in the number of individuals in the wild which has been either observed as ongoing or as having occurred in the past (but with a potential to resume); or is inferred and projected on the basis of ... levels or patterns of exploitation”).
- The basking shark is listed as Vulnerable by IUCN, and dramatic declines (by well over 50%) in some areas of its original range have been reported.
- The basking shark has a very low reproductive potential and fisheries records over the past decades indicate that this species cannot withstand intense fishing pressure, while high prices for fins increase international demand.
- In light of the low productivity of the species and evidence of significant population declines, the precautionary principle should be followed; any uncertainties regarding the status of this poorly-studied species or the impact of trade should be resolved in the best interest of the conservation of the species.
- Basking shark fins in trade are relatively easily identified. In addition, a quick and accurate genetic testing method for identifying shark fins to species was published in July 2002.
- Appendix II listings of threatened shark species could greatly benefit the long-term future of these species and effectively assist global conservation efforts and management of fish stocks.
- Listing on Appendix II will help to implement, in part, the FAO International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks). CITES presently offers the only established and effective means of monitoring international trade in sharks at the species level.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The annual loss of sharks is alarming - 100 *million* sharks are caught every year and some shark species may have declined by as much as 80% in the past decade. Over-fishing and by-catch of many shark species is a matter of global concern.

Parties first expressed concern over the unsustainable levels of exploitation of certain shark species at COP9, in 1994. In Resolution Conf. 9.17, the Parties recognized that international cooperation is necessary to develop specific conservation and management mechanisms for sharks and that international trade in sharks and shark products needs to be adequately monitored and controlled. Through international cooperation with the FAO, other fisheries bodies, and governments, as well as the CITES Animals Committee, some steps have already been taken. One of the most significant results is the development of an International Plan for Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks) by the FAO, adopted in 1999.

The IPOA-Sharks will not be successful unless shark trade data are collected and adequate monitoring systems are adopted and implemented. The World Customs Organization (WCO) has noted that, only with the assistance of CITES, will such data be adequately collected; this can only be achieved through the Appendix II listing of relevant shark species in trade. Therefore, CITES has a unique role to play in the conservation and ecologically sound management of sharks. Eight years after the Parties acknowledged the need to slow the dramatic decline of many shark populations, the time to take action has come.

BIOLOGY AND DISTRIBUTION

The basking shark is the second largest fish in the world, reaching lengths of up to 40 feet. As a filter-feeder, it can strain up to 2000 tons of water per hour through its gills to remove zooplankton on which it feeds (such as small crustaceans and larvae), that are “basking” on the water’s surface.

Basking sharks live in temperate and cold waters of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. They are found in waters of 54 Range States of the West Atlantic, the East Atlantic, the West Pacific and the East Pacific oceans. Little is known about the life history of the basking shark. It sometimes appears only for a few months along the coast and



then disappears for the rest of the year. It may hibernate in deeper water during winter. Estimates suggest that basking shark populations grow by a maximum of 1-2% per annum. The basking shark has a low reproductive rate: gestation is thought to be between one and three and a half years, with an estimated litter size of six. They are slow growing and reach sexual maturity late in life.

PROTECTION STATUS

The basking shark is listed as Vulnerable by the IUCN, is on Appendix III of CITES by the United Kingdom, and is on Annex C of the European Union CITES Regulation. Japan and Norway have a reservation to the Appendix III listing.

At COP11 in 2000, the United Kingdom proposed that the basking shark be listed on Appendix II in order to regulate and control international trade. However, this proposal narrowly failed to get the necessary two-thirds majority. International trade in basking shark products remains mostly unregulated.

MAJOR CONSERVATION THREATS TO BASKING SHARKS

Basking sharks were traditionally killed for their liver oil, meat for human consumption and animal feed, and skin for leather. Post-World War II fisheries targeted the fish for oil used in lubricants, cosmetics and vitamin substitutes. Today the prime fishery is for their fins, which continue to increase in value as the demand rises for shark fin soup. Single large basking shark fins were reported on sale in China for over US\$15,000 in 1999. China and Japan also hunt basking sharks for their livers, which are used in aphrodisiac preparations, health supplements and cosmetics. Small basking shark fisheries also operate in Norway from April/May to August/September. The catch in the East Atlantic is now limited to 400 tons of liver weight per year, which may still threaten the population.

The demand for basking shark fins, coupled with over-fishing and uncontrolled trade, and the basking shark's low growth and reproductive rates, has resulted in dramatic population declines in certain areas. The basking shark is rare in areas where it was once common. Catches have dropped by 80% in some areas. Local extinctions are quite likely unless comprehensive, precautionary measures are adopted to protect this highly migratory species throughout its range.