



EU scores Pacific protections for Manta and Devil Rays

IATTC takes steps to safeguard rays, but leaves finning ban weak, and sharks under-protected

Guayaquil, Ecuador. July 3, 2015. Fishing nations at the annual meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) have taken concrete, groundbreaking steps to conserve Eastern Pacific manta and devil rays, but have failed to reach consensus on proposals to strengthen the region's ban on shark finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea) or on bids to curb fishing of hammerhead and silky sharks.

The EU proposed to prohibit retention and mandate safe release of **manta and devil rays** in the region's fisheries, in line with recommendations from IATTC scientific staff. The US, Ecuador, and Vanuatu spoke in favor of the proposal, but concerns expressed by Guatemala led to an exception for rays taken in developing countries' small-scale and artisanal fisheries for domestic consumption.

"We are pleased that countries have moved beyond voluntary measures for manta and devil rays, and have begun to address the plight of these magnificent yet exceptionally vulnerable species," said Sonja Fordham, President of Shark Advocates International. "The new IATTC measure can help to prevent population depletion, bolster national protections, and enhance the potential for ray-based tourism. Conservation programs for the exempted small-scale fisheries are, however, essential and urgently needed to ensure the health of these migratory populations."

Costa Rica and the EU joined forces in an effort to strengthen the IATTC **shark finning ban** by replacing the problematic fin-to-carcass weight ratio limit with a more enforceable prohibition on at-sea fin removal. The joint proposal received strong support from the US, El Salvador, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and France, and yet, in the end, was blocked by China and Japan.

"We are frustrated that China and Japan continue to oppose the best practice for preventing the wasteful practice of shark finning, and thereby manage to thwart the collaborative work of a growing number of countries," said Rebecca Regnery, Deputy Director for Wildlife at Humane Society International. "We are encouraged, however, by the global momentum toward ending at-sea removal of fins, and will continue to promote stronger finning bans at fisheries bodies around the world."

This year's proposals for **hammerhead** and **silky shark** management measures, from the US and EU, respectively, were less stringent than prohibitions proposed previously, yet were still defeated due to objections from Costa Rica.

"Hammerheads are among the world's most threatened sharks, and the IATTC's own scientists have warned that immediate safeguards for silky sharks are critical for rebuilding," said Rosa Indenbaum, International Conservation Legal Fellow for Defenders of Wildlife. "Inaction in light of these facts is deeply disappointing, and reveals a persistent and problematic chasm between countries' environment agencies that have committed to hammerhead and silky shark conservation through wildlife treaties, and the fisheries interests that are represented here."

Many NGOs collaborated to promote the ray and shark proposals, producing a joint [position statement](#), a [mobulid ray fact sheet](#), and interventions from the floor.

"Our coalition thanks the EU for their consistent efforts to secure shark and ray conservation measures at regional fisheries bodies around the world," said Ali Hood, Director of Conservation for Shark Trust. "We look forward to opportunities to assist the European Commission and EU Members States in bolstering the case for action and further expanding support for beneficial change."

Media contacts: (US) Liz Morley: +1 843.693.5044; (Europe) Hannah Tarrant: +44 7855 386083

Notes to Editors:

Shark Advocates International is a Washington, DC based project of The Ocean Foundation dedicated to securing science-based policies for sharks and rays. Defenders of Wildlife works to protect animals and plants native to North America. Humane Society International is one of the only international organizations working to protect all animals. The Shark Trust is a UK charity working to advance the worldwide conservation of sharks through science, education, influence and action. Project AWARE is a growing movement of scuba divers protecting the ocean planet – one dive at a time.

IATTC has 21 Members, and is responsible for the conservation and management of tuna and other marine resources in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

Manta and devil rays (family Mobulidae) are landed for their meat and increasingly for their gill plates which are used in a Chinese health tonic. Shark fins are used in a celebratory soup prized in Asia. High demand for fins drives many shark fisheries and provides incentive for finning. Many types of sharks are also often landed for their meat.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies Eastern Pacific mobulid rays as Vulnerable (*Manta birostris*), Near Threatened (*Mobula japanica*, *M. munkiana*, and *M. thurstoni*), or Data Deficient (*M. tarapacana*) on the IUCN Red List. Great and scalloped hammerheads (*Sphyrna mokarran*, *S. lewini*) are categorized as globally Endangered, while smooth hammerheads (*S. zygaena*) are considered Vulnerable. Silky sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) are classified as Near Threatened.

In 2014, all species of manta and mobula rays were listed on Appendix I of the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), which carries obligations for strict protection. In addition, these rays, along with silky sharks and two hammerhead species, were listed on CMS Appendix II, which signals a commitment to cooperate regionally to conserve shared populations.

Both species of mantas as well as great, scalloped, and smooth hammerheads were listed in 2013 under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Appendix II, which obligates Parties to limit international trade to that which can be demonstrated to be the result of sustainable and legal fishing through non-detriment findings.