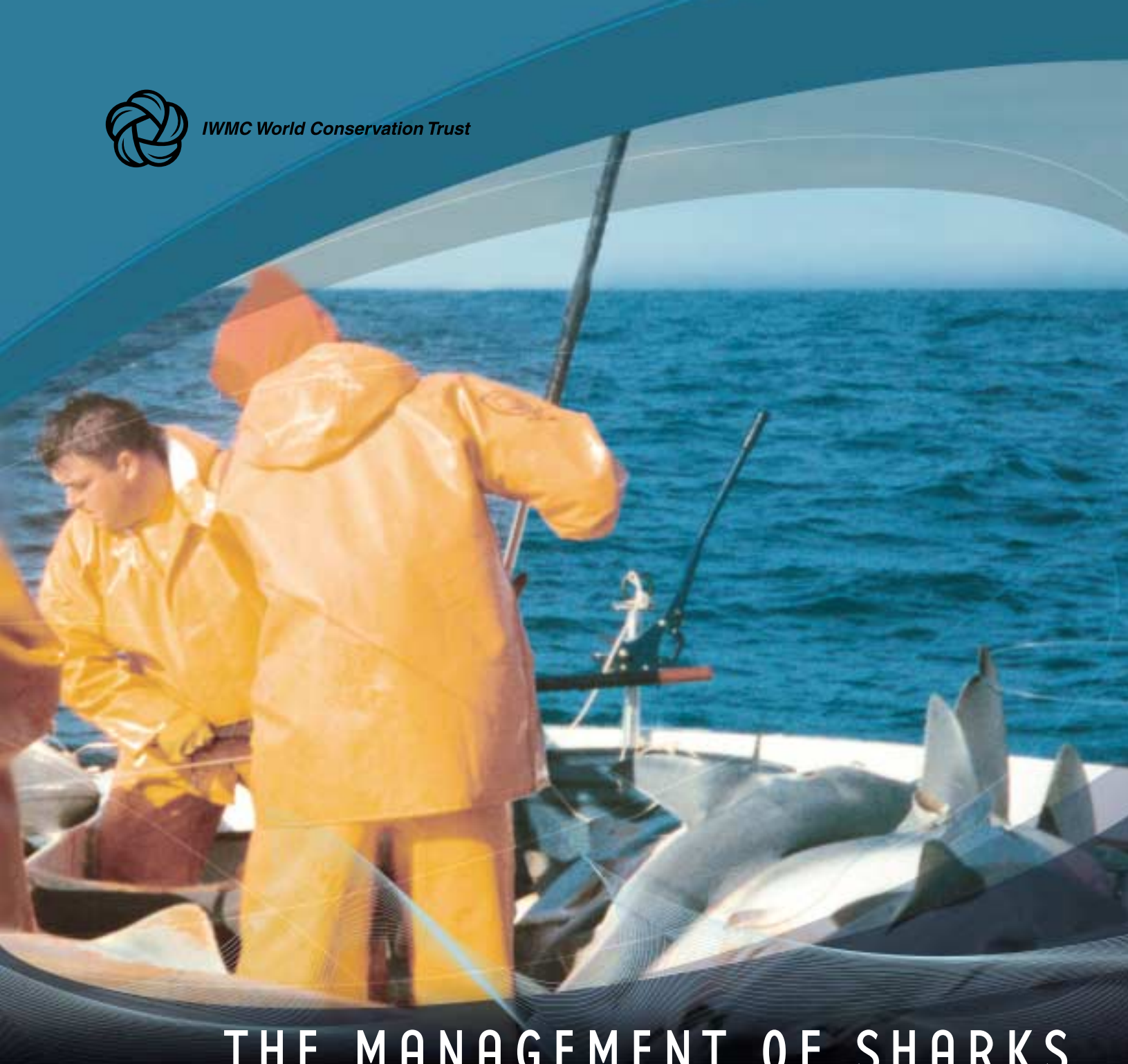


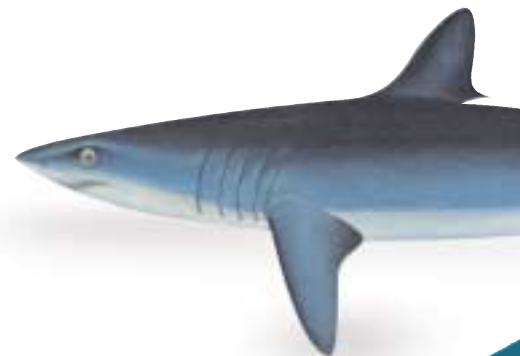


IWMC World Conservation Trust



THE MANAGEMENT OF SHARKS

Conserve Through Trade





THE MANAGEMENT OF SHARKS CONSERVE THROUGH TRADE

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SHARKS - KEY FACTS

Sharks have swum the oceans for around 250 million years, residing at the top of the marine food chain. Their only known predators are other sharks and man.

Nearly 400 shark species exist, covering most parts of the world. Among the largest are the whale shark, which can grow to a length of 50 feet (15 meters), and the basking shark at 42 feet (13 meters). The great white can grow to a length of around 25 feet (7.5 meters).

The tiger shark, one of the most feared species, can grow to 20 feet (6 meters) and will eat almost anything. The mako shark measures up to 14 feet (4 meters) and can travel at speeds of 45 mph (72 kmph).

Of the hundreds of millions of sharks in the oceans, many migrate great distances due to climatic, food and environmental factors.

Sharks eat seals, sea lions, bottlenose dolphins and small cetaceans, elephant seals, porpoises, turtles, tuna and other fish, as well as other sharks.

PRODUCTS



The history of today's best known shark dish, shark fin soup, can be traced back to its introduction in the Far East over a thousand years ago. Shark fins were first consumed by the Song Dynasty around the year 998 and the soup became popular during the Ming Dynasty (around 1368).

In Chinese culture, the serving of shark fins has come to symbolize honor and respect, in part because it was once a luxury dish that few could afford. Now shark fin soup is widely consumed around the world, remaining especially popular in the Far East where it is also customarily served on special occasions.

In addition to its high nutritional value, shark fin soup is believed to provide people with a range of medical benefits. It gives us more energy by strengthening the

kidneys and muscles and, by reducing blood fat levels, it reduces the risk of coronary heart disease, hypertension and arteriosclerosis. Shark oil is used in some skin cosmetics.

Shark meat is consumed in many countries, although its quality varies from species to species. Lower quality meat, together with shark skin and bone, is utilized in fish meal and fertilizer. In the past the skin has been used as an abrasive to polish objects and as a strong upholstery fabric.

The natural resistance of sharks to any form of cancer is currently the subject of a number of medical studies and may help researchers discover new cures for the disease.



SHARK FISHING

Sharks are an important marine resource for many cultures and communities throughout the world and therefore must be carefully managed.

More than one hundred countries are engaged in shark fishing. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, the global shark catch today is over 800,000 metric tonnes per year, representing around 0.6% of world fisheries.

While no shark species is threatened with extinction or likely to become threatened by current commercial or recreational fishing practices, some areas around the world have seen significant declines in regional populations. This is thought to be due to factors such as over-fishing and, in some cases, environmental pollution.

In other regions the reverse is true. Over the last few years, the U.S.A. has seen a sharp rise in shark attacks at tourist beaches. This may be caused in part by the tight restrictions placed on commercial shark fishing by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in the 1990s. As their populations have risen, the increased competition for food is believed to have encouraged sharks to move closer to shore in search of their prey.

REGULATING SHARK FINNING

Some countries, such as the U.S.A., have prohibited fishermen from removing fins from sharks and then discarding their carcasses at sea. While this practice is indefensible – and also dangerous - if the shark is alive, it is not necessarily wasteful for some dead sharks to be finned and their carcasses returned to the ocean to be consumed by other marine species.

Because sharks are often taken as bycatch, any regulations on shark fishing have to be carefully thought through. General restrictions can make fishing less economic for many fishermen, who often live in poor communities. This can cause economic hardship and

social problems. If new regulations simply encourage the unreported return of large numbers of dead sharks to the sea, they can also create wasteful fishing practices.

Finning dead sharks is a practical and efficient means of utilizing resources if the meat will not be consumed by humans or if it has a high urea content and might contaminate the meat of other catches like tuna and swordfish. Indeed, with other fisheries, such as tuna, processing on vessels also involves returning unwanted parts to the ocean.



FISHING COMMUNITIES



The dependence of coastal communities in many countries on shark fisheries was illustrated recently, when India suddenly banned on all shark fishing in July 2001.

Although this decision was subsequently rescinded in December 2001, it raised the specter of enormous job losses in poor coastal communities in what is the second largest shark fishing country in the world.

Around 20,000 fishermen, most in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, depended almost entirely on sharks for their livelihoods. A further 100,000 fishermen in states like Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, faced reductions in income from the ban because sharks were a part of their annual catches. In addition, thousands of people working in shark processing and at the large Mangalore dry fish market were faced with losing their jobs.

Concerns were raised that the ban would also have a negative effect on other fisheries. Because offshore fishing leads to shark bycatch, it would become less economic. Moreover, the resulting growing populations of sharks would consume more fish, making less available for the fishermen.

Ultimately, India removed the blanket ban and instead imposed restrictions on a limited number of shark species. This represented the beginning of a national management plan for sharks.



ACTION BY THE UNITED NATIONS



Experience has shown that shark stocks can be sustainably harvested to provide stable fisheries. As with other marine resources, sound management is required to avoid declines in population that will constrain future catches.

The mission of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is “to help build a food-secure world for present and future generations.” The FAO plays the lead international role in fisheries management, with its Fisheries Department and Committee on Fisheries aiming “to facilitate and secure the long-term sustainable development and utilization of the world’s fisheries and aquaculture.”

In 1999, under its Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the FAO adopted a voluntary International Plan of Action (IPOA) for Conservation and Management of Sharks. This proposes guidelines for individual countries to develop into National Plans of Action (NPOA) that will improve the data collection, monitoring and management of shark fisheries and ensure their long-term sustainable use.

These plans are to include an assessment of the status of shark stocks and should aim to ensure that catches are sustainable, vulnerable or threatened stocks are identified and given special attention, unused incidental catches are minimized, and that there is full use of dead sharks.



A ROLE FOR CITES?

Most countries belong to both the FAO and CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), the intergovernmental treaty that regulates international trade in threatened species.

While great white, whale and basking sharks are not globally threatened with extinction, or likely to become so, proposals have recently been made to place them in the Appendices of CITES because of indications of a fall in some regional population levels.

This has led to a potential conflict over the roles of the FAO and CITES in managing sharks and other fisheries. CITES is an administrative mechanism that aims to prevent the biological extinction of species due to international trade. It establishes international trading procedures but is not equipped to deal with overall species management issues such as those required to address commercial fisheries.

One of the major areas of difficulty for managing shark populations is the lack of reliable catch, biological and scientific data. CITES requires a degree of certainty about changes in population levels, the impact of trade and the biological vulnerability of a species to become extinct before they can be placed onto its Appendices.

In the case of these large sharks, CITES listings would not necessarily help increase regional stocks because international trade is not a primary cause of their decline. As an administrative process, listings would nevertheless create a cumbersome and bureaucratic process for international fisheries. If, on the other hand, sustainable harvests and the benefits they provide people can be achieved by the FAO IPOA process, conservation aims will also be better realized.





CONCLUSION

The sound international management of sharks requires countries to implement effective plans that do not unfairly penalize fishing communities.

The FAO's initiative to do this will take time to show results. If its plans are shown to be ineffective, they will need to be revised or replaced. At the moment, it is important that unnecessary complexities are not introduced by those impatient to promote shark conservation.

In the meantime, the FAO and CITES should work together to find areas of cooperation that will improve the overall international management of sharks.



ABOUT IWMC WORLD CONSERVATION TRUST

IWMC (International Wildlife Management Consortium) World Conservation Trust is a global coalition of experts and wildlife managers. Its top management team has extensive experience working in international organizations such as CITES.

IWMC World Conservation Trust

- is a global non-profit organization promoting the conservation of habitat and wildlife resources
- advocates the use of science-based wildlife management techniques and the humane, ethical and fair treatment of all people whose customs and traditions involve the sustainable use of wildlife resources
- works to strengthen international cooperation among all those concerned with wildlife conservation, promotes public education and aims to foster understanding of the importance of the sustainable use of wildlife resources in our changing world.

IWMC is headquartered in Switzerland with offices in the USA, Canada, Argentina, China and Japan.



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