



The 16th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties

Proposal to Include Oceanic Whitetip Shark in CITES Appendix II

Colombia, along with Brazil and the United States of America, has submitted a proposal for consideration at the 16th Meeting of the CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP16) to include the oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) in Appendix II of CITES. Adoption of this proposal requires a two-thirds majority of CITES Parties present and voting at CoP16.

What is CITES?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), an international agreement that binds 177 nations, is designed to ensure that international trade in animals and plants does not threaten their survival in the wild. The Parties to CITES meet every two to three years at a Conference of the Parties (CoP). During this meeting, they review and vote on (1) amendments to the appendices listing which species are included in CITES; and (2) proposed resolutions and decisions to improve the effectiveness of CITES. CoP16 will take place in Bangkok, Thailand, during March 3-14, 2013.¹

Species protected by CITES are included in one of three appendices:

- Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction and provides the greatest level of protection, including restrictions on international commercial trade.
- Appendix II includes species that, although currently not threatened with extinction, may become so without trade controls. Trade is regulated through a permitting system that helps ensure traded species are harvested legally and sustainably.

¹ For more information on CITES and CoP16, see our web page at <http://www.fws.gov/international/cites/cop16/>



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- Appendix III includes species protected by at least one country, which needs assistance from other Parties to regulate trade.

What do we know about Oceanic Whitetip Sharks?

The oceanic whitetip shark is a large, top-predator of open oceans with one of the most widespread ranges of any shark. The species spans every ocean in tropical and subtropical waters, including offshore U.S. waters. Oceanic whitetips were once described as one of the most common sharks found in temperate and tropical waters.

However, populations of the species have declined markedly. The best available information shows that over an eight-year time period, abundance of these sharks in the Northwest and Western Central Atlantic regions declined by about 70 percent. Abundance in the Gulf of Mexico may have declined as much as 99 percent over a 40-year time period. In the Central Pacific, catch rates declined

by greater than 90 percent between 1995 and 2009. In 2006 the IUCN classified the oceanic whitetip shark as Vulnerable globally and as Critically Endangered in the Northwest and Western Central Atlantic because of the enormous declines that have been found.

What are the threats to Oceanic Whitetip Sharks?

The primary threats to oceanic whitetip sharks are unsustainable harvest to supply the international shark fin trade and mortality from bycatch in fisheries targeting other species. Historically, the oceanic whitetip shark has been subject to fishing pressure throughout most of its range, being caught in large numbers as bycatch in multiple fisheries. Studies conducted in the Indian Ocean indicate that only 41 percent of oceanic whitetips caught as bycatch in the longline fishery survive long enough to be released, and post-release survivorship remains unknown. While countries have attempted to curb bycatch, global harvest – especially in high seas waters beyond any country's



national jurisdiction – is poorly monitored.

The oceanic whitetip shark is a slow-growing species, reaching maturity only after 4 to 7 years and living for 13 to 22 years, depending on the population. The species will have litters averaging 5 to 6 pups once every two years and a gestation period of 9 to 12 months. Where oceanic whitetips are sought after, individuals that are caught and harvested are often juveniles that have yet to reach sexual maturity. For these reasons, the species has been very slow to recover from overexploitation.

Why did Colombia, Brazil, and the United States cosponsor the proposal to include Oceanic Whitetip Sharks in Appendix II?

Shark fins are highly valued in international trade (wholesale value: \$20-39 USD/lb) for use in popular

delicacy foods. Of all shark fins in trade, the oceanic whitetip's large fins are one of the most distinctive and one of the most common in trade. In the year 2000, an estimated 600,000 oceanic whitetip sharks were traded globally for the fin trade.

The United States previously submitted a proposal to include the oceanic whitetip shark in Appendix II at the 15th Meeting of the CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP15). Although this proposal received more than a simple majority of votes, it did not receive the needed two-thirds majority and, therefore, was not adopted. Since then, a recent stock assessment has reaffirmed that certain populations of this species have continued to decline. Because of this new information, as well as continued international and domestic concern,

Colombia, Brazil, and the United States decided to co-sponsor a proposal submitted to include the oceanic whitetip shark in Appendix II.

What would it mean to include the Oceanic Whitetip Shark in Appendix-II of CITES?

Species that are listed in Appendix II of CITES are not banned from international trade. Indeed, the species can still be traded internationally when accompanied by the appropriate permits. The purpose of this permitting system is to enable international authorities to regulate the trade in specimens of species in order to avoid uses incompatible with their survival, thereby ensuring the sustainable use of the species for generations to come.

These permits require: 1) a scientific finding that the export will not be detrimental to the survival of that species (this may include setting quotas for the maximum allowable catch); and 2) a finding that the specimen was legally acquired. For example, oceanic whitetips caught as bycatch might not be considered legally acquired and could not be exported if harvest had not been in compliance with applicable regulations. If the oceanic whitetip proposal for inclusion in Appendix II is adopted, it is expected to significantly reduce the fishing pressure on the species, while still respecting historic use of the shark and helping to ensure its survival in the future.

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