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WWF-New Zealand Submission on:

**Draft National Plan of Action for the Conservation and
Management of Sharks (NPOA-Sharks) 2013**

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Purpose

As part of New Zealand's obligation under the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s International Plan of Action for Sharks (IPOA-Sharks), the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) – working in collaboration with the Department of Conservation (DOC), the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), and stakeholders – have produced an updated National Plan of Action for Sharks (NPOA-Sharks), as part of a 5-year review cycle. The draft document was released for public consultation on November 10th for a period of 4 weeks.

The purpose of the NPOA-Sharks is to maintain the biodiversity and the long-term viability of all New Zealand shark populations. The term 'shark(s)' and the scope of the NPOA-Sharks encompasses all cartilaginous fishes (such as sharks, skates, rays and chimaeras) in New Zealand's EEZ and territorial waters, and species taken by New Zealand-flagged vessels fishing on the High Seas. The NPOA-Sharks sets directions for 2013-18 to ensure the conservation, management and sustainable utilization of sharks by establishing a purpose, goals, and 5-year objectives that will be implemented through MPI's annual fisheries planning processes.

This document provides WWF-New Zealand's submission on the draft NPOA-sharks 2013, particularly on the issue of shark finning – defined as the removal of the fins from a shark and the disposal of the remaining body at sea. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

WWF-New Zealand

WWF-New Zealand (WWF) is part of a global network, using a science-based approach to encourage government, business and communities to conserve and manage our environment more sustainably. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- Conserving the world's biological diversity;
- Ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable;
- Promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

Background

New Zealand is home to over 113 species of sharks, rays, skates, and chimaeras. Of these, over 70 have been recorded in fisheries while only 11 are managed under the Quota Management System (QMS). Additionally, there are serious information gaps in this system, making some species inadequately managed. Even the most commonly caught sharks have never had a quantitative stock assessment. This makes it nearly impossible to set accurate quotas and guarantee the species' long-term survival.

Sharks and their relatives have much lower reproductive output, and generally lower growth rates, than bony fishes and therefore merit particular care and attention to ensure that their populations are maintained at healthy levels. There is a real concern that the shark fin trade is contributing to a substantial global decline in shark populations. Internationally, over 100 million sharks are estimated killed every year, many for their fins. Nearly 30% of all shark species are now threatened or near-threatened with extinction. This is affecting the balance of life in our oceans and damaging marine ecosystems.

Almost 100 countries and states around the world have banned shark finning or shark fishing altogether. Some nations, including many islands in the Pacific, have declared their ocean

territories as shark sanctuaries. These countries have recognised the ecological, economic and cultural value of sharks alive is far greater than the dollar value of their fins. Despite this, New Zealand remains a significant player in shark fishing and shark finning internationally. We are the 13th biggest fishing nation for sharks, 10th export nation of shark meat and products, a major exporter of shark fins to Hong Kong, and we became the biggest exporter of dried shark fins to the USA in recent years.

WWF key recommendations on the draft NPOA-Sharks 2013

1. The New Zealand government must eliminate shark finning (objective 2.5) as quickly as possible and through implementation of the best available strategies. The HMS fishery should be prioritised first, as it currently contains the highest proportion of shark finning.
2. The definition of shark finning (as listed in footnote 2 of the NPOA-Sharks) must not be limited to the Order Selachii (sharks and rays) as it has the potential to create a loophole allowing the development of new markets for species not currently finned (or finned at very low numbers) and/or incentives for intentional misidentification of species. The ban should be applicable to all members of the Chondrichthyan family and irrespective of management under the QMS.
3. New Zealand must commit to a ban on shark finning requiring that all sharks caught in HMS fisheries are either released back into the ocean (dead or alive) or landed with their fins naturally attached (FNA). FNA is considered international best practice because it is easy and cost effective to implement, provides for better species identification and data collection by management officials at ports, removes the incentive to kill sharks just for their fins (allowing a significant portion to be released alive), and reinforces the law against live finning. Both the United Nations and the Convention on Migratory Species (under their Sharks MoU) advise/call for countries to ban shark finning through requiring sharks be landed with FNA.

WWF does not believe this requirement will transfer the issue of wastage from the sea to landfills, as the majority of the three main pelagic sharks which are currently being finned (95% wasted and 100% dead) could be released alive (0% wasted, and 64-91% alive).

4. In all other fisheries (Inshore and Deepwater), sharks must be either released alive, landed with their fins naturally attached, or processed at sea but fully utilised.
5. For Inshore and Deepwater fisheries, MPI should conduct an urgent investigation into shark fin conversion factors with an aim of generating accurate, species-specific fin-to-body ratios. MFish should also urgently investigate the landed state of fins (wet, dry or in between) across a wide range of species and fisheries, with a view to withdrawing wet fin conversion factors and requiring fishers to use dry fin conversion factors.
6. WWF supports the adaptation and use of a risk-based assessment and prioritization framework for better managing all sharks found in New Zealand waters.
7. The NPOA should prioritise research into methods for modifying fishing gear in ways which reduce shark bycatch and minimize damage to their habitat while having minimal impact on the target species catch. In particular, the use of J hooks, wire leaders, and 'shark lines' (shorter branch lines that are set directly below the buoys and are often baited with squid) should be phased out on longlining vessels as soon as possible. Other mitigation techniques utilized globally with varying degrees of success, such as bait type, depth of gear setting, and soak times should also be investigated and trialed as soon as possible. It is not appropriate to devote excessive Crown resources to investigating

potential meat markets on vulnerable non-target species, particularly when stock status is unknown and economically-viable options for mitigation and live release exist.

8. New Zealand must sign and implement the Convention on Migratory Species MoU on Sharks in 2014, and cooperate in international shark conservation efforts.
9. The observer coverage required to achieve the objectives of the NPOA should be assessed, and a timeframe for raising coverage to these levels should be established, in all fisheries that catch sharks, whether as target or bycatch. WWF believes that at least 10% coverage is required in all significant shark fisheries, and that such coverage should be attained within two years.
10. MPAs, closed areas, closed seasons, and gear restrictions should be investigated and applied where appropriate.
11. Further measures should be introduced to reduce the main sources of incidental mortality for protected species. These might include implementing time-area closures or regulating the use of certain types of fishing gear in some areas.
12. The biology and fisheries of New Zealand sharks should be reviewed to identify species that might benefit from maximum and/or minimum size limits, and methods for achieving this should be identified.
13. "Open access" shark species should be moved into a management regimes as soon as possible. MPI should urgently review all species that currently receive no protection to determine appropriate management mechanism(s).
14. The NPOA should promote a ban on shark liver fisheries where they involve discarding the remainder of the shark. The landing and sale of shark livers should be restricted to species that are managed under the QMS.

Summary

WWF-New Zealand is greatly encouraged to see that the necessary steps are being taken to eliminate shark finning in New Zealand waters. We commend and fully support the New Zealand government towards this decision, urge swift implementation of strategies, and recommend the adoption of best practice methodology and technology.

Thank you for considering the matters raised in this submission.

Sincerely,

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