

16th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

Proposal for the inclusion of hammerhead sharks species in Appendix II of the CITES Convention

Brazil, together with Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico and the European Union, has sponsored a proposal on the inclusion of three hammerhead sharks species in CITES Appendix II that will be discussed during the 16th Meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP-16) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).



Text of the proposal: Inclusion of *Sphyrna lewini* (scalloped hammerhead shark) in Appendix II in accordance with Article II paragraph 2(a) of the Convention and satisfying Criterion A in Annex 2a of Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP14).¹ Inclusion of *Sphyrna mokarran* (great hammerhead shark) and *Sphyrna zygaena* (smooth hammerhead shark) in Appendix II in accordance with Article II paragraph 2(b) of the Convention and satisfying Criterion A in Annex 2b of Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP14).

What is CITES?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement signed by 177 nations. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival in natural habitats. At the Meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COP), the member States review the implementation of the Convention and may consider and adopt amendments to its Appendices I and II. COP-16 will be in Bangkok, Thailand, from 3 to 14 March 2013. For more information, visit: <http://www.cites.org>

Species protected by CITES rules can receive three different levels of protection:

- **Appendix I** includes species threatened with extinction which are or may be affected by trade. Trade in specimens of these species must be subject to particularly strict regulation in order not to endanger further their survival and must only be authorized in exceptional circumstances. This is the highest level of protection under CITES.
- **Appendix II** includes species which although not necessarily now threatened with extinction may become so unless trade in specimens of such species is subject to strict regulation in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.
- **Appendix III** includes species which any Party identifies as being subject to regulation within its jurisdiction for the purpose of preventing or restricting exploitation, and as needing the co-operation of other Parties in the control of trade.

What do we know about hammerhead sharks?

Hammerheads are circumglobal shark species that live both in coastal areas and open seas, ranging from warm tropical waters to temperate seas. Despite this feature, populations are isolated and genetically distinct. These animals have slow growth, low natural mortality and long life, living up to 35 years. Depending on the species, sexual maturation is attained between 5 and 15 years. Each adult female becomes pregnant only every two years and generates 4-42 pups per litter. This strategy, combined with the habit of forming huge aggregations, makes the hammerhead shark populations especially vulnerable to intense fishing compared with other fishes. Hammerhead species can reach up to 5m in length and, as top predators, are crucial for the maintenance of ecosystem balance.

Which are the main threats to hammerhead sharks?

The most important threat to hammerhead sharks species is the international trade of their fins. These fins are considered one of the best for the preparation of "fin soup" and, depending on the specie, the price of unprocessed fin in the international market can vary from 88 to 135 USD per kilo. This is a great incentive to directed fishing of these species, including in international waters, making the sustainable management of these fisheries a great challenge. Around 1.3 to 2.7 million sharks (representing 49 to 90 thousand tons) are caught each year to sustain the fin market. Hammerheads are also caught during fishing operations of other species (bycatch), a fact that contributes to a higher fishing pressure over its populations.

The best available data show that in recent years, hammerhead populations have decreased dramatically. The level of declines are estimated to be between 80-90% in Southwest Atlantic waters; 85% in North Atlantic; 98% in Northwest Atlantic; 99,9% in the Mediterranean Sea; 50-75% in the Indian Ocean; and 71% in Southwest Pacific. These figures show a quite serious situation that can lead to a series of environmental and economic damages that must be avoided. For this reason, the *International Union for Conservation of Nature* (IUCN) assessed the scalloped hammerhead as globally "endangered" (EN).

Why the proponents are co-sponsoring the proposal to include the hammerhead in Appendix II?

During the 15th Conference of the Parties to CITES (COP-15), a similar amendment for the inclusion of hammerhead sharks in CITES Appendix II was discussed. Although this proposal has received more than a simple majority of votes, it did not reach the required two thirds majority for the adoption at that time. Since then, additional studies have shown that hammerhead populations continued to decline consistently, a fact that helped to increase the national and international concern with these species. In 2010, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) recommended a restriction in captures of several species of hammerhead sharks for international trade, including the three referred species (Recommendation 10-08).

Considering that CITES has a broader scope when compared to regional fisheries management organizations, the inclusion of these species in its Appendix II is a way to support and strengthen the existing measures for its conservation and sustainable use. For all these reasons, the proponents decided to sponsor the proposal that will be discussed at COP-16.

What are the consequences of the inclusion of hammerheads species in CITES Appendix II?

Listing does not mean that the species is banned from international trade, since the trade of these species will still be permitted, as long as accompanied by the appropriate CITES permissions. The CITES permits system requires: 1) a scientific assessment that the trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species; and 2) that the sharks have not been acquired in contravention of the provisions of the domestic legislation or the Convention. The listing of hammerhead species would also help to improve trade data gathering, reporting and information on species status. It is important to emphasize that, since the Convention focus only in international trade, fisheries for domestic consumption or trade will not be affected by CITES provisions.

For those reasons, listing hammerhead species in CITES Appendix II can ensure that the trade in these species is compatible with the survival of the species, ensuring the sustainable use of this resource for future generations.

