



March 29, 2016

Hon. Minister Tootoo
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
200 Kent Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Hon. Minister Tootoo,

On behalf of our organizations, we are writing to request your leadership on a number of shark and ray management and conservation issues this year. Collectively, we represent organizations working on shark and fisheries conservation across the globe, including the ocean areas surrounding Canada. We maintain a special focus on elasmobranch (shark and ray) conservation due in large part to the low reproductive capacity that leaves most of these species exceptionally vulnerable to overexploitation. We are deeply concerned about the precarious status of these species, which has been caused by overfishing, a lack of science-based fishing quotas, and poor compliance with best practices.

Canada is home to many species of sharks and rays (including skates), many of which are both commercially important and also at risk of disappearing. In Atlantic Canada, the five species of elasmobranch which most commonly interact with our fisheries are spiny dogfish, blue shark, porbeagle shark, shortfin mako, and thorny skate. Of these species, all five have been found to be at elevated risk by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Blue shark, thorny skate, and spiny dogfish were assessed as "Special Concern" species. Shortfin mako were assessed as "Threatened" and porbeagle as "Endangered".

A recent report on the [Global Priorities for Conserving Sharks and Rays](#) identified Canada as a key player in achieving goals for sustainable shark and ray fisheries. We believe that, under your leadership, Canada can play an important and necessary role both domestically and internationally to improve the status of shark and ray species in our waters, and around the world. We recommend the following actions, which are achievable this year and will set Canada on a path to become a leader in the protection of these vulnerable species.

Support fins naturally attached rules domestically and internationally as the best practice for preventing shark finning

Requiring sharks to be landed with fins naturally attached to the body at the first point of landing is the most straightforward and reliable way of enforcing Canada's existing ban on shark finning (slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea) and can greatly improve species-specific data collection. Fin-to-body ratios, still used in some

fisheries in Atlantic Canada to monitor finning ban compliance, have been widely criticized over the last decade as difficult to enforce. In addition, Canadian data on finning ban implementation has not been made publically available, offering no means for verifying what species are being caught or if the 5% ratio is indeed effective.

The Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO) North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) has already adopted a fins-attached rule in 2014. At the 2015 annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), more than half of the 50 Parties co-sponsored a proposal to strengthen the ICCAT finning ban with a fins naturally attached requirement. While the measure ultimately did not pass, Canada's resistance year after year continues to be noted by a global audience. Furthermore, the issue is taking away space that could be used in other important negotiations and Canada is weakening relationships with other countries over this issue. Similar proposals have also been made for multiple years at NAFO with increasing support. We are hopeful that the increasing momentum behind fins-attached proposals is now sufficient to allow Canada to join the effort to secure stronger international finning bans and to replicate this best practice at home. Given Canada's long-term reluctance, a change of stance now has the potential to be a game-changer for ensuring effective enforcement of this fundamental element of shark fisheries management.

Reduce the TAC for Porbeagle Shark

At the 2015 ICCAT meeting, Canada and the other ICCAT members agreed on a measure for porbeagle sharks, after six years of debate. We are hopeful that this action signaled that Canada was ready to take additional measures to protect this species domestically. We remind you that porbeagles were assessed as Endangered in Canada by Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) for the second time in 2014, with the population rebuilding period estimated at close to 100 years. During a decade-long *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* listing process, no action was taken to aid recovery, apart from banning an almost non-existent directed fishery.

According to DFO's SARA Listing Policy and Directive for "Do Not List" Advice, a decision not to list a species must be accompanied by compelling rationale and a proposed workplan. The current Canadian porbeagle TAC is set at 185 tonnes, a volume associated with recovery in the next century. It is high time to offer this exceptionally depleted population more effective protection. At the very least, we urge you to reduce the TAC to no more than 2014 catch levels in line with a recovery time closer to 40 years. It is of course imperative to enact accountability measures to prevent TACs from being exceeded, and to subtract any overages from the subsequent year's TAC. We believe substantial TAC reductions are needed immediately to demonstrate DFO's commitment to porbeagle conservation, while inaction will likely lead to increased calls for a complete ban on retention.

Support science-based catch limits for shortfin mako and blue sharks at ICCAT

The US and EU have proposed measures to heed ICCAT scientists' advice to prevent increased fishing mortality on shortfin mako and blue sharks. Canada has yet to support

such measures. Continued unlimited take of these highly migratory species by multiple countries puts both the populations and the associated fisheries at great risk. We urge Canada to join the effort to establish science-based catch limits for mako and blue sharks.

Establish a science-based quota for skates at NAFO

We remain seriously concerned about the status and management of thorny skate. This species has been classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as *Vulnerable* globally and *Critically Endangered* off the U.S. east coast, and has been designated a species of "special concern" by the COSEWIC.

Canada holds a significant share of the NAFO thorny skate TAC, and NAFO Parties have repeatedly failed to heed scientific advice for this limit. We believe Canada has a key role in negotiating quota reduction as well as an important responsibility to work to ensure the sustainability of this vulnerable species. Moreover, adherence to scientific advice is integral to Canada's stated approach to fisheries management.

Sign the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (Sharks MOU)

The Sharks MOU aims to "improve the understanding of migratory sharks and rays, ensure the sustainability of fisheries, protect critical habitats and migration corridors, increase public awareness and participations, and enhance international cooperation." This MOU was developed under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) and has been signed by the European Union and 38 other countries, including, Australia, South Africa, and the Philippines, as well as non-CMS Parties like the United States. Signing the CMS Sharks MOU would offer Canada an opportunity to focus more closely on sharks and rays, and work collaboratively with other countries towards conservation of shared populations. It would also signal to the world that Canada is committed to the conservation and sustainable use of these important species.

Support listing additional shark and ray species on CITES Appendix II

In September, Canada and other Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) will decide the fate of proposals to list thresher sharks, silky sharks, and devil rays on CITES Appendix II. Such a listing would prompt much needed controls aimed at ensuring that trade in these vulnerable species is sourced from legal and sustainable fishing operations, while also complementing implementation of the 2013 listings for other commercially valuable and similarly traded sharks and manta rays. We urge Canada to actively support the adoption of these well-founded proposals, and to assist developing countries in implementing associated measures.

Expedite the process for hiring of shark scientist in Atlantic Canada

In mid-2015, Canada's only dedicated shark researcher retired from his position. Since that time, there has been no one leading shark research in Canada. This position is key for meeting Canada's domestic and international shark management obligations, including basic data reporting, and should be filled immediately.

Thank you for considering our views. We look forward to working with you and your staff toward a new era of shark conservation leadership by Canada.

Sincerely,

Katie Schleit



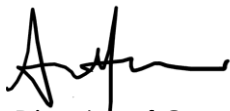
Senior Marine Campaign Coordinator
Ecology Action Centre

Sonja Fordham



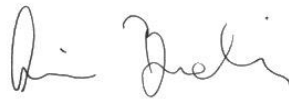
President
Shark Advocates International

Ali Hood



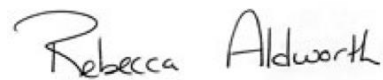
Director of Conservation
Shark Trust

Ania Budziak



Associate Director, Programs
Project Aware

Rebecca Aldworth



Executive Director
HSI/Canada

CC:

Hon. Fin Donnelly, Co-Chair All-Party Oceans Caucus, NDP Critic for Fisheries and Oceans

Hon. Scott Simms, Co-Chair All-Party Oceans Caucus,

Hon. Mark Strahl, Conservation Critic for Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

Hon. Elizabeth May, Leader, Green Party

Kevin Stringer, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystem and Fisheries Management

Morley Knight, Regional Director General, Maritimes Region, DFO

Sylvie Lapointe, Director General of Fisheries Management, DFO