

## 182 COUNTRIES TO VOTE ON ENDANGERED MAKO SHARK PROTECTIONS AT INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE CONFERENCE IN GENEVA

**Geneva, Switzerland - 15 August 2019** – Today, many wildlife species are threatened with extinction. In addition to the destruction of their habitats and other threats, some species are also put at risk by international trade. From August 17 to 28, 182 countries plus the European Union will gather for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora's (CITES) eighteenth Conference of Parties (CoP18) in Geneva, Switzerland. Recognized worldwide as one of the strongest international conservation agreements, CITES protects more than 30,000 species and has been instrumental in preventing extinctions for numerous plants and animals. The international body is also able to help curb rapid global declines in shark and ray populations. Though CITES currently protects 12 shark species, all nine manta and mobula rays, and all five sawfishes, many Parties and conservationists believe additional shark species need increased protection from poorly-managed fisheries driven by international trade demand for their products.

“It's estimated that upwards of 70 million sharks and rays are caught and killed annually to supply the unsustainable global shark fin and meat trade,” explained Michael Scholl, Chief Executive Officer of the Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF), a Swiss-based philanthropic organisation supporting shark and ray conservation projects worldwide. “If the meat is low value, they may be finned and thrown back into the sea, to die from suffocation, blood loss or starvation. Even when finning doesn't take place, inadequate fisheries and trade management for shark fins and meat can cause extreme population declines, largely because they are fished far faster than they are able to reproduce.”

At CoP18, Parties will discuss and vote on proposals to list 18 species of threatened sharks and rays on CITES Appendix II. If adopted, this international ruling will ensure that any future trade in their products is controlled and sustainable, providing the global level protections they urgently need. All 18 species have received significant political support, with proposals for Appendix II listing provided by over 55 Parties. In the case of the shortfin and longfin mako sharks, the newly released results of a landmark study that was partially funded by Save Our Seas, has further demonstrated the critical importance for these species' listings.

Published in the journal *Nature* on July 24, 2019 by SOSF project leader David Sims and Nuno Queiroz (Marine Biological Association Laboratory, Plymouth, UK) and 148 other scientists from around the world, the Global Shark Movement study has revealed those areas in the open ocean where harmful industrial fishing activities overlap with threatened oceanic shark hotspots – including the habitat of endangered shortfin mako. Results indicated that in an average month, the areas of the open ocean most used by pelagic sharks will overlap with industrial longline fisheries about one quarter of the time. Most worryingly, a very high degree of overlap with longline fisheries occurs in hotspots for this struggling species (62%).

“Makos may be the fastest shark in the ocean, but they are also slow-growing, heavily sought-after, largely unprotected, and receive virtually no fisheries regulation – making it nearly impossible for them to outswim overfishing,” explained David Sims. “The current proposal for listing makos in CITES Appendix II comes at a crucial time for these severely threatened species. My collaborators and I strongly encourage CITES Parties to consider the new information from this paper and vote ‘yes’ for listing makos.”

In addition to this study, recent updates to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species and the release of an International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) stock assessment for the shortfin mako shark indicate that the species is Globally Endangered and that the North Atlantic stock will continue to decline until at least 2035, even if fishing ceases immediately (as advised by scientists). Their close cousins, longfin makos, are also listed as Globally Endangered by IUCN.

“The Global Shark Movement study and these other new pieces of evidence, which were unavailable at the time of CITES CoP18 proposal drafting and assessment, show clearly why it is so hard for makos to survive intensive longline fisheries for long

enough to reach maturity and reproduce”, explained Sarah Fowler, Scientific Advisor of Save Our Seas. “A CITES Appendix II listing may represent the last opportunity to secure the future sustainability of global mako shark fisheries, before it’s too late.”

Parties at CoP18 will discuss and vote on shark listings, including makos, towards the end of the Conference in late August 2019 at Geneva’s Palexpo exhibition center. Follow the hashtag #CITESCoP18 on social media to stay up-to-date on conference developments.

#### **ABOUT SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION**

Founded in Geneva, Switzerland in 2003, the Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF) is a philanthropic organisation aimed at protecting and caring for the world’s oceans. Its support for research, conservation and education projects worldwide focuses primarily on endangered species of sharks, rays and skates. Three permanent SOSF research and education centres reinforce its action in The Seychelles, South Africa and the USA.

Over the last 15 years, SOSF has supported some 300 projects worldwide, passionately upholding the founder’s plight to protect the population of sharks, rays and skates, whose presence is essential to the health and biological diversity of our seas.

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