CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

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CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS FOR AMENDMENT OF APPENDICES I AND II

Proposal Summary – Oceanic Whitetip Shark *Carcharhinus longimanus*

Proposal
Inclusion of the oceanic whitetip shark *Carcharhinus longimanus* 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): "*it is known, or can be inferred or projected, that the regulation of trade in the species is necessary to avoid it becoming eligible for inclusion in Appendix I in the near future.*"
A delay in the entry into effect of the listing in Appendix II for 18 months is proposed to provide time to resolve technical and administrative issues.

Proponents
Brazil, Colombia and the USA.

Rationale
The oceanic whitetip shark qualifies for inclusion in CITES Appendix II because it is a globally threatened, low-productivity species that is over-exploited for its fins through bycatch in global pelagic fisheries. CITES Appendix II listing will assist States, regional entities, and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) in ensuring compliance with finning and other prohibitions affecting this species, while also providing the basis for science-based limits on exports that can complement other fishery management measures and be enforced by importing CITES member States.

IUCN Red List Status
Vulnerable globally; Critically Endangered in the NW and WC Atlantic[1].

Species Description and Life History
The oceanic whitetip shark is distributed worldwide, generally in far-offshore epipelagic tropical and subtropical waters, up to ca. 30° latitude. It occurs in all the world's oceans, including the eastern Atlantic from Portugal to the Gulf of Guinea; the Indo-Pacific from the Red Sea and the coast of East Africa to Hawaii, Samoa, Tahiti and Tuamoto Island; and the eastern Pacific from southern California to Peru.

The oceanic whitetip shark grows to 325–342 cm in length. It lives to a maximum age of 13 years and reaches sexual maturity as late as seven years of age. Females give birth to an average of five to six pups every two years after a 9–12 month gestation. Estimates of the species' intrinsic rate of population increase (0.09–0.07 yr^{-1}) indicate a vulnerability to over-exploitation and associated long recovery time from population depletion, based on the low-productivity category (<0.14 yr^{-1}) established by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Population Trends
The oceanic whitetip shark was once extremely common throughout the world, but numbers have been declining, severely in some regions. Although there is a shortage of quantitative data with which to determine global trends in this widely distributed oceanic species, catch data indicate declines of 60–70% in the northwestern and central Atlantic Ocean between 1992 and 2000 and declines of 99% in the Gulf of Mexico over the last 40 years. Other analyses based on catch-per-unit effort (CPUE) and biomass point to as much as a 10-fold decline in the species' abundance in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean. Although information is particularly lacking in the Indian Ocean, studies and observations from the Maldives and elsewhere provide evidence of significant population reductions.

Economic Importance
Very few small-scale fisheries, primarily in the Gulf of Aden and off the Pacific coast of Central America, target oceanic whitetip sharks. Most fishing mortality of this species results from bycatch in tuna and swordfish fisheries, usually by vessels using pelagic longlines and purse seines. Although the meat (skin, liver, oil) of the oceanic whitetip shark is sometimes consumed or used locally, the shortage of space on fishing vessels and relatively high value of the species' fins compared to the rest of the animal encourage its being finned at sea and the fins marketed in the international fin trade.

Despite their prevalence as bycatch in pelagic fisheries, catches of oceanic whitetip sharks are generally neither recorded nor reported and, therefore, may be much higher than estimated in certain areas. For example, trade data suggest that reported (by a fraction of member Parties) catches to ICCAT-the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas may be under-estimating the actual catch of this species in the **Atlantic Ocean** by up to 50-fold. In the **Pacific**,

1 The full IUCN Red List species assessment and supporting documentation for *Carcharhinus longimanus* and details of the IUCN Red List and Red List Criteria are available at: www.iucnredlist.org

recent studies have produced annual bycatch estimates of 7,253 oceanic whitetip sharks in the north Pacific and 539,946 oceanic whitetip sharks in the central and south Pacific. In the eastern Pacific, information collected by IATTC-the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission indicates that oceanic whitetip sharks account for 20.8% of that region's total shark bycatch. Catches of oceanic whitetip sharks are not reported to the IOTC-the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, but studies have found the species present on 16% of all Spanish and French tuna purse seines operating in the **Western Indian Ocean**, and the IOTC considers the species to be among the most commonly caught elasmobranch species in the region, regularly taken by longlines, gillnets and purse seines.

International Trade

The fins of oceanic whitetip sharks caught as bycatch are frequently retained and traded internationally because of high demand and market prices. The value of the distinctive, easily identifiable fins of this species ranges from USD 45 to USD 85 per kg. In the absence of species-specific information about either the quantity or value of imports and exports of oceanic whitetip sharks, the most reliable data can be obtained from examination of the Hong Kong market, the largest trader in shark fins in the world. Recent studies estimate that between 220,000 and 1,210,000 oceanic whitetip sharks were traded globally in 2000, representing ca. 2% by weight of the global shark fin trade.

Illegal Trade and IUU fishing

The full extent of illegal fishing and trade in oceanic whitetip sharks is unknown, but, given the known low value of its meat, the majority of the fins of this species that reach international markets are understood to be the result of finning at sea, a practice that is prohibited by most RFMOs and a growing number of countries. The absence of international regulation of the shark fin trade, as well as insufficient fisheries enforcement and illegal trade routes impede the effectiveness of these finning bans as a fishery management measure.

Demand from international shark fin markets is recognized as the driving economic force behind the mortality of oceanic whitetip sharks caught as bycatch. At-sea observations indicate that the majority of oceanic whitetip sharks caught on pelagic longlines are brought to the vessel alive and would most likely survive if released unharmed, in accordance with numerous RFMO shark resolutions and national finning bans. However, the high value of oceanic whitetip fins and lack of international trade controls encourage the removal and retention of fins and discard of shark carcasses rather than the release of thousands of live, unharmed oceanic whitetip sharks.

Legal Status

The oceanic whitetip shark is listed in Annex I, Highly Migratory Species, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, yet no specific arrangements have been put into place for cooperation in its management. Most RFMOs – including ICCAT, IATTC, IOTC, and the West and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission-WCPFC – as well as 21 States and the European Union have adopted finning bans, which require the full utilization of captured sharks and encourage the live release of incidentally caught sharks. In addition, ICCAT, IATTC, and WCPFC have prohibited retention on-board, transshipment, and landing of the oceanic whitetip shark in the fisheries covered by their Convention areas. However, these RFMO regulations apply only to their Contracting Parties and the fisheries governed by their respective treaties. Like finning bans, these measures are only effective if supported by compliance mechanisms; as a result, the actual catch, finning and trade of oceanic whitetip sharks remain largely unrestricted.

At the national level, the oceanic whitetip shark may benefit from recent legislation enacted by French Polynesia, Palau, the Maldives, Honduras, the Bahamas, Tokelau, and Marshall Islands to prohibit all shark fisheries throughout their exclusive economic zones (EEZs). Numerous countries have designated marine protected areas (MPAs) where no shark fishing is permitted, such as Cocos Island (Costa Rica), Malpelo Island (Colombia), Galapagos Islands (Ecuador), the Banc d'Arguin (Mauritania), and in Guinea-Bisseau. However, illegal shark fishing and finning in many of these areas compromise the effectiveness of these measures.

CITES History

The oceanic whitetip shark was proposed for listing in CITES Appendix II at CoP15 (Doha, 2010). Although the proposal obtained a majority of votes in favour, it did not achieve the two-thirds' majority required for adoption. The *ad hoc* Expert Panel convened in December 2009 by the FAO to review this and other CITES marine proposals concluded that this species meets the criteria for inclusion in Appendix II, and that

> *"the resulting regulatory measures could aid management of this species by improving catch monitoring and encouraging assessments of sustainability of harvests. Most harvests would be from international waters, falling under the "introduction from the sea" provisions of the Convention. These would require catch documentation to the species level and that a non-detriment finding indicating that the harvest was sustainable be provided for all catches moving from international waters to the jurisdiction of a State." (FAO, 2009)*

This summary of the proposal for CITES listing has been prepared by a coalition of NGOs working to promote shark conservation. It is not a formal CITES document. The original full text of the proposals can be found here:http://www.cites.org/eng/cop/16/prop/index.php

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