



DOW Position Statement for the 102nd Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission Climate Crisis

September 2 – 6, 2024

Defenders of Wildlife urge the IATTC Commission to adopt the following recommendations on observer coverage, electronic monitoring and sharks.

Observer Coverage and Electronic Monitoring

2024 Asks:

1. Amend [Resolution C-19-08](#) to increase observer coverage to 20% for [longline vessels](#) over 20m by 2026.
2. Increase observer coverage to 20% through a formal, non-voluntary, fleet-wide observer coverage for [purse-seine vessels](#) of less than 354 tons carrying capacity.
3. Adopt interim minimum standards for [electronic monitoring](#) in the Eastern Pacific.

Background:

Observer coverage and electronic monitoring systems (EMS) are critical for the collection of catch data related to target and non-target species. This type of information is essential to achieve sustainable management practices and the lack of such data is a persistent challenge for bycatch mitigation in the IATTC convention area. Currently, observer coverage on longline and small purse-seine vessels is insufficient for accurate catch estimates and the use of EMS is not required in fisheries under the purview of the IATTC. At this year's annual meeting, Defenders of Wildlife is calling on the Commission to adopt three measures that would improve catch data and facilitate the long-term conservation and sustainable use of marine species in the convention area.

Longline Observers

5% observer coverage for longline vessels over 20m is required by [Resolution C-19-08](#), but analysis by IATTC scientific staff shows that this coverage level is too low to generate accurate catch estimates for target and non-target species. Studies show that 20% is the minimum level of coverage necessary to achieve accurate bycatch estimates.

Defenders of Wildlife supports increasing observer coverage to 20% by 2026 as recommended by the IATTC scientific staff

Purse-seine Observers

Observer coverage on purse-seine vessels of less than 364 tons carrying capacity is voluntary; there is no formal fleet-wide on-board observer coverage program. As a result,

information about the activities of purse-seine vessels in this size category is limited and incomplete. In alignment with the IATTC scientific staff, Defenders of Wildlife supports a non-voluntary, fleet-wide observer program with 20% coverage.

Electronic Monitoring

Electronic monitoring systems can be used to record fishing vessel activities, gather target and non-target species data, and supplement observer programs. Currently, EMS are not required for vessels fishing within the IATTC convention area. To promote the deployment of EMS within the EPO, an *ad hoc* electronic monitoring working group (EMWG) was convened in 2023 and it developed a draft set of interim minimum standards for electronic monitoring in 2024. Defenders of Wildlife supports the adoption of minimum standards based on the work of the EMWG as a step towards a longer-term goal of 100% observer coverage (to be met with human observers or EMS) on vessels fishing within the IATTC convention area.



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Shark Conservation

2024 Asks:

1. Incorporate the best handling and released practices contained in [SAC-15-11](#) (Annex I) into Resolution C-23-07 and make compliance with them mandatory.
2. Adopt the [list](#) of shark species recommended by the SAC to be brought under the purview of the IATTC.
3. Develop a [conceptual model](#) of life history, ecology, and spatial population structure for hammerhead species *Sphyrna lewini*, *S. zygaena*, and *S. mokarran* similar to the one described in Talwar et. al. 2024 for silky sharks.

Background:

Sharks populations within the IATTC convention area are threatened by incidental capture and inadequate management practices. Incidental capture contributes directly to shark population decline while a lack of information about life history, ecology, and population structure impairs shark management. Fishing-related threats to sharks can be mitigated through best handling and release practices and greater species level information for management. The following three measures would reduce bycatch mortality and increase species level information for improved management measures.

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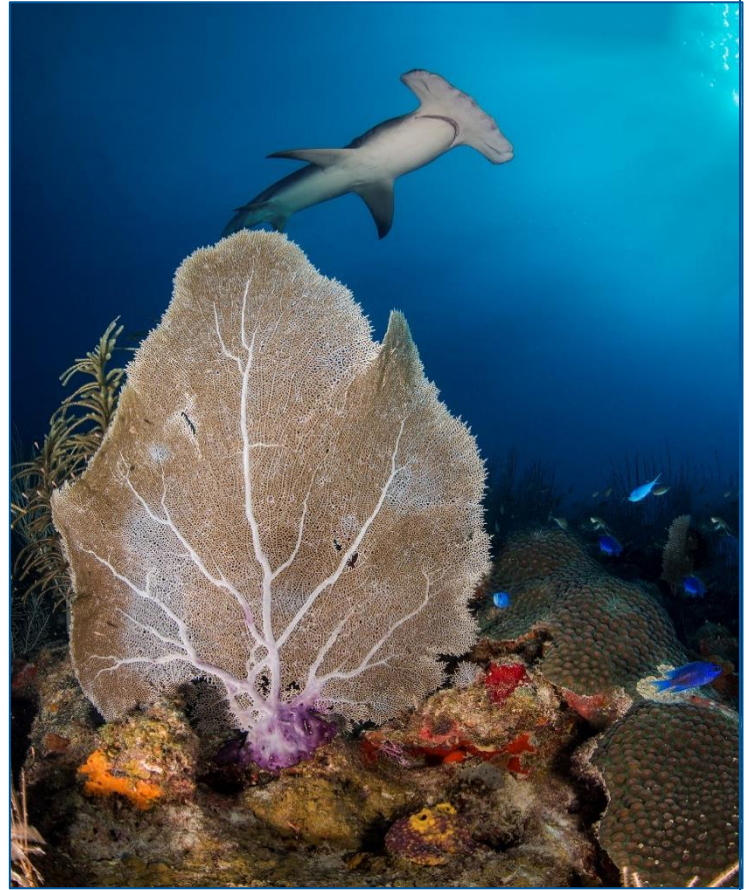


Best Handling & Release Practices

Shark bycatch mortality is increased by time out of the water or on a hook and through poor handling practices by the crew that can cause fatal injuries. Current guidelines on shark handling practices are not comprehensive and do not contain the most updated, scientifically informed best practices. The best handling and release practices for sharks proposed in [SAC-15-11](#) would reduce shark mortality by reducing time out of water or on hooks and by encouraging crews to handle sharks in ways that are safer for both the sharks and the crews. The SAC recommends incorporation of these best handling and release practices into [Resolution C-23-07](#) on a voluntary basis. Defenders of Wildlife supports the SAC recommendation to incorporate the Annex 1 best handling and release practices into Resolution C-23-07 but urges CPCs to consider making the practices mandatory to improve compliance. Additionally, Defenders of Wildlife encourages the Commission to support and promote fleet-wide best practices training programs to facilitate implementation and compliance.

The Shark List

Shark species that interact with IATTC fisheries can be vulnerable to fishing impacts. Pursuant to [Resolution C-23-07](#), the SAC and IATTC scientific staff are directed to develop a draft list of shark species to be brought under the purview of the IATTC. Such a list could help support data collection and management measures for species which interact with IATTC fisheries. A preliminary list of, at minimum, 19 oceanodromous and epipelagic species was [suggested](#) by the scientific staff and [amended](#) to 18 species by the SAC. Defenders of Wildlife supports the adoption of the list as modified by the SAC but emphasizes that the list should eventually be expanded to include more shark species, particularly those with a vulnerable conservation status. Defenders of Wildlife also supports the development of a list of ray and mobulid species as proposed by the SAC and the Ecosystem and Bycatch Working Group.



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Conceptual Models

Conceptual models of life history, ecology, and spatial population structure provide greater species level information which can be used for species management. *Sphyrna lewini*, *S. zygaena*, and *S. mokarran* are hammerhead shark species vulnerable to IATTC fishing activity. The IATTC scientific staff and Ecosystem and Bycatch Working Group have recommended that conceptual models for these species be developed to inform management decisions and reduce the vulnerability of these species to fishing activities within the convention area. Defenders of Wildlife supports this recommendation and emphasizes that models such as these are critical for conservation.

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