



## **European Shark Week opens with call to “Make the PUSH” to protect Europe’s sharks**

**15.10.11:** The Shark Alliance, a coalition of more than 100 conservation, scientific and recreational organisations, is launching the fifth annual European Shark Week today by calling on European Union (EU) fisheries ministers to protect sharks from overexploitation and finning - the wasteful practice of slicing off a shark’s fins and discarding the body at sea.

Member groups of the Shark Alliance, aquariums, dive groups, and other conservation organisations in at least 16 countries across the EU, including Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Slovakia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, will be holding events, filming messages for fisheries ministers, and gathering petition signatures to urge policy makers to resist industry pressure and make the push to protect sharks.

For five years, the Shark Alliance, EU fisheries and environment officials, and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have been discussing the need to better protect sharks. Two years ago, EU Fisheries Ministers endorsed a sound EU Shark Action Plan that led to significant strides toward conservation of these exceptionally vulnerable species. Yet, there is unfinished business:

Targeted EU shark fisheries continue without limits, many endangered species remain unprotected, and the EU ban on ‘finning’ still has huge loopholes that make it possible to fin sharks without detection or punishment.

“Public pressure across Europe has made a real and positive difference in shark conservation. We already have more than 20,000 petition signatures, but we need all those concerned about the future of our sharks to help make the push to ensure loopholes in the finning ban are finally closed and ministers live up to the commitments of the EU Shark Plan of Action”, said Alexander Buttigieg, founder of Sharkman's World Organization, a member of Shark Alliance.

The Commission’s long-awaited proposal for strengthening the EU finning regulation is expected in the autumn and represents a critical opportunity to take the EU finning ban from lagging to leading and to positively influence finning policies around the world.

“The EU is a leader in the global catch, consumption and trade of sharks, and every EU Member State has the duty to press for sound shark conservation policies at the EU level as well as in our national waters,” said Alexander

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Buttigieg. “We are hopeful that the public support expressed through European Shark Week will encourage decision makers to take a stand for the much needed protection of sharks from overexploitation and finning”.

**To sign the petition, go to <http://sharkalliancepetition.org/>**

For more information about European Shark Week, which runs from Saturday, October 15 through Saturday, October 23, visit [www.europeansharkweek.org](http://www.europeansharkweek.org).

**ENDS**

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

This year’s European Shark Week is calling for:

- A complete ban on removing shark fins at sea
- Shark and ray catch limits based on scientific advice and the precautionary approach
- EU and national protections for endangered shark and ray species

Sharks’ slow growth, late maturity and small number of offspring make them especially susceptible to overexploitation, and slow to recover once depleted.

The high value of shark fins, in contrast to typically lower value shark meat, creates the economic incentive for shark finning. Landing sharks with fins naturally attached not only effectively halts the practice of finning, but also offers vastly improved information about the species caught, vital for robust population assessment and effective shark management.

Although the current EU finning regulation prohibits the removal of shark fins at sea, a derogation allows EU Member States to allocate fishermen with special permits to remove fins on board vessels, provided the shark fin to whole body weight ratio of the catch does not exceed 5%. This ratio is higher and thereby more lenient than ratios used in other countries. Permitted fishermen are also able to legally land shark fins and bodies in separate ports, which further hampers control and enforcement. Germany and the United Kingdom recently stopped issuing these permits. Spain and Portugal grant them for most of their shark fishermen. Cyprus has recently issued one.

The EU Plan of Action for the conservation and management of sharks includes, among other things, a pledge to strengthen the EU finning ban. In their 2009 endorsement of this Plan, the EU Council of Ministers urged the Commission to give special attention and priority to the issue of finning.

Earlier this year, the European Commission completed a three-month public consultation on options for amending the EU Finning Regulation, including a ban on at-sea fin removal. Comments reflected strong support for the “fins naturally attached” option from conservationists, scientists, divers, aquarists, and citizens. The “fins naturally attached” method has also been recommended by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature)

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and the United Nations, and is used in many shark fisheries in Central America, Australia, and the United States.

The Shark Alliance is a coalition of more than 100 conservation, scientific and recreational organisations dedicated to restoring and conserving shark populations by improving shark conservation policies. The Shark Alliance was initiated and is coordinated by the Pew Environment Group, the conservation arm of The Pew Charitable Trusts, a non-government organisation that is working to end overfishing in the world's oceans.

For the past five years, every October, members of the Shark Alliance in Europe have run a week of activities for supporters and other shark enthusiasts to find out more about sharks and shark conservation. During European Shark Week 2010, activists held events in 13 EU countries and generated over 34,000 postcards and petition signatures from member groups, aquariums, dive centres and schools which, with thousands more e-mails and letters, were sent to MEPs, a majority of whom then signed a Written Declaration, which became a resolution of the European Parliament, calling on the European Commission to deliver a proposal to prohibit the removal of shark fins on-board vessels.

Sharkman's World Organization has been an active member of Shark Alliance since 2007

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR TO ARRANGE MEDIA INTERVIEWS,  
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