Global and EU shark catches

It is difficult to obtain accurate figures for shark landings by country. This is partly because countries do not always report their landings to the FAO. When they do, it is common to find that the figures are different - usually lower - than the figures produced for domestic use.[1]

A 2006 investigation in the Hong Kong shark fin market revealed that global shark catches are three to four times higher than those officially reported. Basing her calculations on the volume of shark fins available on the Hong Kong market, the author concluded that the actual volume of the global catch is between 1.21 and 2.29 million metric tons per year[2].

Between 2000 and 2008, the average global catch of sharks reported to the FAO was 824,364 tonnes (live weight). Of this total, almost 80% was caught by only twenty countries[3]. These countries, in diminishing order of catch size, were:

Ranking	Country	% of global catch
1.	Indonesia	13
2.	India	9
3.	**Spain**	**7.3**
4.	Taiwan	5.8
5.	Argentina	4.3
6.	Mexico	4.1
7.	Pakistan	3.9
8.	USA	3.7
9.	Japan	3.0
10.	Malaysia	2.9
11.	Thailand	2.8
12.	**France**	**2.6**
13.	Brazil	2.4
14.	Sri Lanka	2.4
15.	New Zealand	2.2
16.	Portugal	1.9
17.	Nigeria	1.7
18.	Iran	1.7
19.	**UK**	**1.6**
20.	South Korea	1.4

Data from Pew Environment Group

EU Member States accounted for 11.5% of the global total between 2000 and 2008. In 2004, the EU accounted for 13% of the world's shark catches[4]. According to the Commission's Consultation

[1] It should be noted that the terms "ton" and "tonne" and the letter "t" appear to be used interchangeably in a number of documents consulted. The spelling used in this briefing is as found in the original text. The difference between a ton and a tonne is approximately 16 kg (the ton being the larger).

[2] Shelley C. Clarke, et al. (2006) Global estimates of sharks catches using trade records from commercial markets. Ecology Letters 9: p. 1115-1126.

[3] The Future of Sharks: a review of action and inaction. Pew Environment Group, January 2011. http://www.pewenvironment.org/uploadedFiles/PEG/Publications/Report/The%20Future%20of%20Sharks.pdf

Document on the proposed amendment of the present EU shark finning Regulation, *"European shark fisheries operate in all of the world's oceans and are very much larger than is generally understood. Taking into account significant under-reporting of shark catches by some of its pelagic fleets, the EU is possibly the world's largest shark fishing entity.*[5]

The European Union includes some of the biggest shark fishing nations in the world. In 2005, EU countries caught nearly 100,000 metric tons of elasmobranches (including sharks, rays and sawfish). Spain took the largest share at around 39 per cent of the EU total, followed by France (22 percent), Portugal (16 percent) and the UK (11 percent)[6].

Under-reporting is not the only explanation for the inaccurate figures produced by the FAO. Research carried out in 2007 found that vessels, in particular Spanish longliners, often land sharks and shark fins at private docks rather than at official ports[7]. These private docks, often owned by large Spanish companies, are commonplace all over the world and their owners are often powerful enough to prevent government inspectors from entering and monitoring shark landings.

In addition, the use of flags of convenience and bi-lateral "joint venture" agreements between EU Member States and third countries may also have a significant effect on landings data, in terms of the attribution of shark catches landed under such agreements.

European shark fisheries are operated by pelagic fleets from Spain, France, the United Kingdom and Portugal in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans, but they are not adequately documented. Historically, these fisheries targeted primarily tunas and swordfish, but their catches of oceanic sharks are as large as (and sometimes larger than) the target catch. Most longliners now also target sharks[8].

Catches of blue shark *(Prionace glauca)*

In 2011, the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) of the International Council for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) provided the 2010 figures for blue shark catches in the North and South Atlantic and in the Mediterranean. In the North Atlantic, Spain caught 26,094 tonnes of blue shark and Portugal caught 8,261 tonnes. France and the UK were the only other EU Member States to report catches in the North Atlantic that year: theirs were 122 tonnes and 8 tonnes respectively. In all, 37,072 tonnes of blue shark were caught by twelve countries or fishing entities in that year, with the combined Spanish and Portuguese landings accounting for 92% of the total catch[9].

In the South Atlantic, Spain caught 13,953 tonnes of blue shark in 2010, and Portugal caught 6,338 tonnes. No other EU Member State reported blue shark catches in this area for 2010. In all, eleven

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[4] Public Consultation on the Amendment of Council Regulation (EC) 1185/2003 on the Removal of Fins of Sharks on Board Vessels
[5] Ibid
[6] Hunted For Fins: how EU fleets target threatened sharks - without management - in the world's oceans. Oceana, May 2007
[7] Fishy Business: how EU shark fleets escape regulation and undermine shark conservation around the world. Oceana, December 2007
[8] Public Consultation on the Amendment of Council Regulation (EC) 1185/2003 on the Removal of Fins of Sharks on Board Vessels
[9] ICCAT SCRS report, 2011. http://www.iccat.es/Documents/Meetings/Docs/SCRC2011-Report-ENG.pdf

countries or fishing entities caught a total of 27,729 tonnes, with Spain and Portugal combined accounting for 73% of the total[10].

In the Mediterranean, five countries caught 217 tonnes of blue shark in 2010. Of these, Spain caught 48 tonnes and Italy caught 165 tonnes, together accounting for 98% of the total[11].

Blue shark status

In 2010, the ICCAT SRCS stated that for both North and South Atlantic blue shark stocks, although the results are highly uncertain, biomass is believed to be above the biomass that would support a Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). Results of the 2008 assessment were conditional on certain assumptions made (e.g. estimates of historical catches and effort, the relationship between catch rates and abundance, the initial state of the stock in the 1950s, and various life-history parameters), and a full evaluation of the sensitivity of results to these assumptions was not possible. Nonetheless, the weight of available evidence does not support a hypothesis that fishing has yet resulted in depletion to levels below the ICCAT Convention's objective[12].

Catches of shortfin mako *(Isurus oxyrinchus)*

According to the European Commission, current EU catches of shortfin mako in the north Atlantic are predominantly by Portuguese and Spanish vessels, although reported landings from Spanish vessels only began in 2004. The UK has also reported landings, but these are negligible (below 3 tonnes)[13].

It has been estimated that in the early 1990s, the Spanish longline fleet caught approximately 750 tonnes per year of shortfin mako in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea[14].

More recently, the ICCAT Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) reported that, in 2010, Spanish shortfin mako catches were 2,091 tonnes in the North Atlantic. Portuguese North Atlantic catches amounted to 1,400 tonnes in that year. The only other EU Member State reporting a shortfin mako catch that year was France, with 2 tonnes. Between them, thirteen countries or fishing entities reported total catches of 4,006 tonnes, with the combined Spanish and Portuguese catches accounting for 88% of the total.

In the South Atlantic, Spanish catches totalled 1,192 tonnes in 2010 and the Portuguese caught 336 tonnes[15]. No other EU Member State caught shortfin mako in the region. Twelve countries or fishing entities caught a total of 2,483 tonnes of shortfin mako in the region in 2010, with the combined Spanish and Portuguese catches accounting for 61% of the total. Spain also caught 1 tonne of shortfin makos in the Mediterranean, the only EU Member State to do so in that year.

[10] Ibid
[11] Ibid
[12] Ibid
[13] European Community Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks. Draft proposal for a Commission Staff Working Document. Shark Assessment Report 2009
[14] IUCN Red List. http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/39341/0
[15] ICCAT SCRS report, 2011. http://www.iccat.es/Documents/Meetings/Docs/SCRC2011-Report-ENG.pdf

In the Pacific, where Spain is thought to operate 24 longliners, the shark catch in 2004 amounted to 6,049 tonnes. The proportion of the catch represented by makos is 27%: the 2004 Spanish catch of makos was therefore in the region of 1,600 tonnes[16]. Note, however, that these catches may also have included longfin makos (*Isurus paucus*).

Shortfin mako status

Shortfin makos are classified by IUCN as Vulnerable globally and Critically Endangered in the Mediterranean Sea. There is a non-negligible probability that the North Atlantic shortfin mako stock could be below the biomass that could support Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). A similar conclusion was reached by the Committee in 2004, and recent biological data show decreased productivity for this species. Data for the South Atlantic are insufficient to make an assessment of stock status[17].

Spain's use of "Special" Fishing permits

The derogation relating to Special Fishing Permits for on-board processing of sharks, far from representing an exception, are treated as the norm in Spanish fisheries. Annual shark landings (at EU ports and non-EU ports) by Spanish vessels holding on-board processing permits were 20,447 tons in 2003, 21,417 tons in 2004, and 18,936 tons in 2005. In 2003, 2004 and 2005, Spanish vessels holding these permits caught an average of 87% of the total shark catch of the Spanish fleet[18].

[16] Hunted For Fins: how EU fleets target threatened sharks - without management - in the world's oceans. Oceana, May 2007
[17] ICCAT SCRS report, 2011. http://www.iccat.es/Documents/Meetings/Docs/SCRC2011-Report-ENG.pdf
[18] Public Consultation on the Amendment of Council Regulation (EC) 1185/2003 on the Removal of Fins of Sharks on Board Vessels.