



CONFERENCE ON FEBRARY 23, 2010 BY **Dra. Sonja Fordham**

**Topic:** Fisheries, Trade and management of populations

**Title:** Shark Conservation in Europe: Progress & Opportunities

**Summary:**

Sharks are among the most threatened species in European waters. The European Union (EU) includes major shark fishing powers -- most notably Spain -- and influences shark fishing policies all around the world. Improving EU shark fishing and protection policies offers wide-ranging benefits for these vulnerable animals as well as the ecosystems and fisheries they support.

The fifth year of the Shark Alliance (a non-profit conservation coalition) brings both satisfaction and disappointment with respect to key European shark policy goals. Over the last year, the number of sharks and rays protected in EU waters has tripled (from two to six), EU fishing limits for targeted shark species have been dramatically reduced to match scientific advice, and limits on skates and rays have been significantly improved. A solid, long-awaited Community Plan of Action for Sharks was finalized by the European Commission and endorsed by all European Member States in early 2009. The Plan includes pledges to close loopholes in the EU regulation that bans shark "finning" (slicing off a shark's fin and discarding the body at sea); these important commitments have yet to be realized, largely due to opposition from within Spain. Germany and the UK have recently strengthened their shark finning policies and yet progress on the European Commission's promised proposal for strengthening the EU finning regulation has been slow.

Meanwhile, the EU has again offered landmark proposals to list commercially valuable shark species (spurdog and porbeagle) under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES); efforts to ensure the success of the proposals in March 2010, under the leadership of the Spanish Presidency, are underway.

The specifics related to progress and the challenges in improving European shark and ray fishing policies will be detailed with a view toward enhancing the involvement of concerned citizens and scientists in the fisheries management process.

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