

Fish stock conservation: prohibition of removing fins of sharks on board vessels

2002/0198(CNS) - 05/08/2002 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to end a practice which results in the death of large quantities of sharks by prohibiting shark finning which involves the removal of fins and the discarding of the remainder of the shark at sea.

CONTENT : the effects of this practice, encouraged by the strong international market that exists for shark fins, is having serious effects on several shark populations. The Commission proposes, therefore, to prohibit this practice within all EU waters and for all EU vessels wherever they fish beyond EU waters. It recognises, however, the possibility for a legitimate targeted shark fishery involving full use of the catch. Given the problems involved in the identification of species on the basis of removed fins, the Commission proposes to apply this prohibition to all Elasmobranchs (which include sharks, skates, rays...). The practice of cutting ray wings would not be covered by this prohibition, however, as it aims at using the most important part of the fish flesh and ray wings are easily recognisable. This prohibition would apply to all types of fishing in EU waters. In line with the EU commitment to stock conservation in all waters where its vessels operate, this practice would also be banned for all EU vessels fishing beyond EU waters. The Commission believes that this approach will encourage the adoption of the measure in Regional Fisheries Organisations. Finning would, however, be allowed if the removal of fins were part of a process to make more efficient use of all the shark parts on board. In this case, the Member States concerned would be required to issue and manage a special fishing permit for this purpose. To ensure that all parts of the shark are kept on board, those issued with special permits would also be required to enter all relevant data in a logbook. According to scientific knowledge, many stocks of shark are under serious threat. Until more detailed scientific data on these species become available to allow for the establishment of appropriate rules to protect them, this measure would contribute to their conservation. There is a strong international demand for shark fins. However, the relative low value of shark meat, combined with the practical constraints of its conservation on board, have encouraged the practice of finning. This proposed Regulation would form part of the implementation by the EU of a plan of action for the conservation and sustainable use of sharks in line with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the FAO International Action Plan for sharks.