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## **SCIENTISTS URGE SWEEPING INTERNATIONAL PROTECTIONS FOR ATLANTIC SHARKS**

### ***New Lenfest Analysis Reveals High Risk for Depletion, Need for Fishing Limits***

WASHINGTON – A group of shark experts today recommended a ban on catching eight species of Atlantic, open ocean (“pelagic”) sharks, and strictly limiting the catch of another two, to prevent possible population crashes. Currently, there are no international limits on shark catch.

The recommendations, released in a report entitled *Management Recommendations Based on Integrated Risk Assessment of Data-Poor Pelagic Atlantic Sharks*, are in response to research demonstrating that ten species of Atlantic sharks currently have a high risk of being seriously overfished.

“Our results show very clearly that there is a critical need to take management action to prevent shark population depletion and maintain ecosystem function,” said lead author Dr. Colin Simpfendorfer of Australia’s James Cook University.

There is little information about the numbers and species of sharks caught in international waters of the Atlantic Ocean. As a result, scientists often have trouble assessing the status of populations and estimating sustainable catch levels, and policymakers have accordingly declined to implement sustainable measures to adequately protect these important ocean predators.

To assess the overfishing risk for shark populations, experts employed a new technique, which takes into account the species’ biology, susceptibility to fishing gear, current population status and other available information.

The scientists recommended catch bans for different reasons. Two species have exceptionally low reproductive rates and a high risk of overfishing. For four other species, there are insufficient data to determine appropriate fishing limits that would ensure healthy populations. A recommendation to limit catch of other shark species was based on updated scientific assessments.

The Lenfest Ocean Program brought together shark experts from Australia, Belgium, Croatia, South Africa and the United States to develop recommendations in part to help the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) make better management decisions for Atlantic pelagic sharks. ICCAT is scheduled to hold its bi-annual meeting from November 17-24 in Morocco, where members of the organization, including the European Union, will

consider the findings of the Lenfest report and additional scientific advice, along with proposals to act upon them.

“Scientists have confirmed that many Atlantic pelagic sharks are vulnerable to overfishing and urgently need protection,” said Charlotte Hudson, an officer with the Lenfest Ocean Program. “We are hopeful that this cutting-edge analysis will inform and prompt the conservation action that is needed to avoid losing these essential ocean predators.”

Although ICCAT is responsible primarily for managing and conserving tunas, it is also the only management body capable of imposing Atlantic-wide restrictions on the catch of sharks taken in tuna fishing gear. Scientists, conservationists and policymakers widely acknowledge that this meeting of ICCAT provides the most immediate opportunity to protect shark species in the Atlantic Ocean.

**Editor’s Note:** To see the recommendations, read Lenfest Research Series summary of the report or view the full report, visit [www.lenfestocean.org](http://www.lenfestocean.org).

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The **Lenfest Ocean Program** supports scientific research aimed at forging new solutions to the challenges facing the global marine environment. The program was established in 2004 by the Lenfest Foundation and is managed by the Pew Environment Group.