

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

A Progress Review of the Defra Shark, Skate, and Ray Conservation Plan.

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Contents

Introduction.....	1
Important Successes.....	1
Annex 1 - Review of Progress against the Fields of Action.....	3

Introduction.

The Defra Shark, Skate, and Ray Conservation Plan provides an outline of the role of elasmobranchs in the ecosystem, their characteristics, and the pressures facing them. It summarises current management and conservation measures to protect sharks, skates and rays and sets out clear policy objectives with the overarching goal of managing elasmobranch stocks sustainably so that depleted stocks recover and that those faring better are fished sustainably.

The Defra Plan of Action identified four important 'Outcomes' necessary to achieve this overarching goal:

1. Catches (targeted and bycatch) of elasmobranchs are sustainable and that action is taken to protect and restore those species most at risk as a matter of priority.
2. Knowledge on elasmobranch fisheries and species is improved through better data collection and scientific research. Information is used to more effectively manage elasmobranchs.
3. International conservation bodies adopt and promote effective conservation measures for elasmobranchs.
4. Increased understanding, education and awareness of elasmobranch issues.

Under each of these challenging 'Outcomes' a number of actions were identified. This review considers the progress made against these 'Fields of Action' since the Plan of Action was published in January 2011.

Important Successes.

Since its publication in 2011 there have been a number of notable successes, the detail of which is covered in Annex 1. However, the most important successes have been identified below.

- Securing the listing of five species of shark, two species of manta ray, and one species of sawfish on the appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
- Securing an ambitious Conservation Plan, a UK expert on the expert panel, and co-chair of the Intersessional Working Group of the Signatories with the USA, under the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) Shark MoU.
- Securing mandatory data reporting for shark species in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) i.e. no data, no fish.
- Securing an amendment to the EU Finning Ban to require all sharks caught by the EU fleet to be landed with their fins still naturally attached to their body.

- Launching a collaborative project with South-west fishermen to establish a scientific bycatch fishery for elasmobranchs in order to collect important fisheries data (NEPTUNE).
- Increasing the use of species codes in landings data and the introduction of electronic logbooks.
- Provision of financial and policy support to the Shark Trust for the production of the annual Commercial Fisheries Advisories and for the production of best practice guidelines by the MMO and Cefas.

Annex 1 - Review of Progress against the Fields of Action.

Outcome 1: Catches (targeted and bycatch) of elasmobranchs are sustainable and that action is taken to protect and restore those species most at risk as a matter of priority.

- Our goal is to achieve sustainable fisheries on all elasmobranch stocks (wherever they are caught). Viable stocks can be subject to commercial exploitation, but this should be on a carefully managed, sustainable basis.
- Species classified as at threat of global or local extinction must be allowed to recover as rapidly as possible. These species should be given additional, bespoke protection, following scientific advice at all times, including measures such as bans on targeted commercial fisheries, legal protection that covers all forms of angling and disturbance and prohibitions on landings and trade.

Action required.	What we have done.
<p>A.</p> <p>Bespoke management measures for the conservation and management of elasmobranchs need to be brought forward by the European Commission under the Shark Plan of Action.</p>	<p>This is an on-going objective which requires community action; however the EU Plan of Action reflects closely what is in the Defra Conservation Plan so deliverables are intrinsically linked and thus reported on later in this section i.e. amending EU Finning Ban, additional measures in RFMOs. The UK government has and will continue to engage closely with the European Commission and other parties to encourage continued implementation of the EU Shark Plan of Action, and have pressed for a review of progress.</p> <p>The UK government also keeps under consideration the need for additional domestic measures for the conservation and management of elasmobranchs where robust evidence indicates they are necessary and when they cannot be</p>

achieved through existing EU fisheries regulations.

To do this we have maintained our close collaborative partnership with fisheries scientists, NGOs, the fishing industry, and the European Commission. We have had regular meetings and on-going discussions.

Whilst the majority of the measures necessary to protect and manage elasmobranchs are progressed within the EU in order that they are effective, some bespoke measures have been adopted in the UK. For example, additional protection is afforded **basking shark** (*Cetorhinus maximus*), **angel shark** (*Squatina squatina*), and **white skate** (*Rostroraja alba*) under Schedule 5 of the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#). The statutory 5 yearly review of Schedule 5 of the Act is currently [underway](#) and the UK government will consider the case for adding additional species to the Schedule during early 2014.

Some local bylaws also continue to be maintained by the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), for example minimum landing sizes for skates and rays by the [Kent and Essex IFCA](#).

Legislation was introduced in 2008 to protect the **tope shark** (*Galeorhinus galeus*). [The Tope \(prohibition of fishing\) Order 2008](#) prohibits the fishing for the **tope shark** other than by rod and line (catch and release) and establishes a bycatch limit for commercial vessels. An informal review of the legislation was conducted during 2010 and this indicated strong stakeholder support and effectiveness, and a high level of compliance. In 2012, as part of the UK government drive to reduce regulation, this legislation was again reviewed and a decision taken to retain it.

In Scotland additional legislation was introduced in 2012. [The Sharks Skates and](#)

	<p><u>Rays (Prohibition of Fishing, trans-shipment, and landing) (Scotland) Order 2012</u> extends current protection measures imposed on commercial fishers under the EU Common Fisheries Policy to recreational sea anglers by introducing a landing ban for 26 species of elasmobranch, including porbeagle (<i>Lamna nasus</i>), spurdog (<i>Squalus acanthias</i>), tope (<i>Galeorhinus galeus</i>), and a number of deep sea sharks.</p>
<p>B.</p> <p>Scientific advice should be followed in European TAC and Quota negotiations and the domestic management of elasmobranchs.</p>	<p>The UK government bases all management decisions, including our TAC and Quota negotiating position at the annual December Fisheries Council, on scientific advice and will continue to do so as a matter of UK policy.</p> <p>We believe the outcomes of the 2012 Fisheries Council negotiations broadly reflected the current scientific advice, recognising that the structural failings of the current CFP does present challenges. We are currently seeking improvements to the clarity and detail of the advice templates provided by ICES on which TACs and Quotas decisions are based in order to remove ambiguity. We also continue to push the European Commission to closely consider the detailed evidence underpinning the ICES advice on elasmobranchs, which is published every two years.</p>
<p>C.</p> <p>EU-wide Review of Regulation 1185/2003 (on shark ‘finning’) should be a priority.</p>	<p>This was a priority focus for UK elasmobranch work in 2012. The UK took the decision to cease issuing special permits in 2009 so this amendment would bring the rest of the EU in line with UK practices.</p> <p>Defra worked closely with The Shark Trust, European Commission and Members of the European Parliament to secure this success. UK Fisheries Minister Richard Benyon made a number of public statements and appearances to highlight the need to tighten the regulation and raise wider support.</p>

	<p>These collaborative efforts were crucial in securing the adoption of the amended Regulation in June 2013. This is an important success which means all sharks taken by the EU fleet must now be landed with their fins still naturally attached with no exceptions.</p>
<p>D.</p> <p>Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) adopt fin on landings</p>	<p>The UK has continued to be supportive of a ‘fins naturally attached’ approach. However, it has not been possible for the EU to actively support this measure within the RFMOs to date due to the on-going negotiations on the proposed amendment to the EU Finning Regulation (1185/2003).</p> <p>Now the amended EU Regulation requires a ‘fins naturally attached’ approach with no exceptions, the EU is now in a position to support the measure within the RFMOs.</p> <p>This was demonstrated at the recent 2013 Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) where the EU vocally supported a proposal for ‘fins naturally attached’ although this unfortunately failed to garner sufficient support from other Parties. However, the UK government will continue to work closely with the EU Commission and important stakeholders to promote this at future meetings of IOTC and other RFMOs such as the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).</p>
<p>E.</p> <p>RFMOs should focus a much larger part of their work on sharks and bring forward a range of specific measures on elasmobranch species.</p>	<p>Whilst progress can be slow much has been achieved to date in the RFMOs, especially within the ICCAT and IOTC.</p> <p>The UK has secured improved management of elasmobranchs in the High Seas through these forums. We have and will continue to push for the adoption of stronger measures within the RFMOs and worked closely with organisations</p>

such as The Pew Charitable Trusts, the EU Commission and Member States to achieve this.

Notable achievements in the RFMOs to date for which the UK government has been closely involved include the banning of shark finning (by implementing fin to carcass ratios), the requirement to record all catches to species level (no data, no catch), and the prohibition of the landing, sale, transshipment, etc of several species of shark including **thresher** (*Alopias* spp) and **hammerhead** (*Sphyrna* spp).

In the build up to the 2012 ICCAT meeting, the UK government worked closely with the EU Commission to develop proposals for resolutions for a retention ban for **porbeagle shark** (*Lamna nasus*), and catch limits for **shortfin mako shark** (*Isurus oxyrinchus*). Whilst neither proposal achieved the necessary support for adoption, bringing these issues forward for consideration will raise the profile of the need for management measures in RFMOs. The UK government will push to have these proposals re-tabled at the 2013 ICCAT meeting.

At the most recent IOTC meeting in May 2013, the UK government worked with the Commission and supported proposed EU resolutions for; **silky shark** (*Carcharhinus falciformis*), **hammerhead shark** (*Sphyrna spp*), and **oceanic whitetip shark** (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) retention bans; mandatory data reporting for shark species; and the adoption of a 'fins naturally attached' approach. Sufficient support was only gained for a retention ban for **oceanic whitetip** with the other proposals failing. The UK will, however, continue to push for the unsuccessful proposals to be re-tabled and adopted at future IOTC meetings.

Outcome 2: Knowledge on elasmobranch fisheries and species is improved through better data collection and scientific research. Information is used to more effectively to manage elasmobranchs.

- Further scientific research on elasmobranchs should be focused on the key actions laid out below, and existing research worldwide collated and analysed to best inform fisheries managers and scientists of the state of elasmobranch stocks. The precautionary principle should be applied where scientific advice is uncertain to prevent the depletions seen in previous targeted fisheries given their vulnerability to overexploitation.

Action required.	What we have done.
<p>A.</p> <p>For depleted, vulnerable species additional scientific information should be collected on the life history, rate of reproduction and habitat types</p>	<p>The UK has initiated and engaged in a number of research projects to address the gaps in our understanding with respect to elasmobranchs.</p> <p>The UK government has been funding a programme of work with Cefas since 2009 to address gaps in our understanding of the ecology, life history and population status of selected elasmobranch species and improve our understanding of the survivability of by-caught elasmobranchs when discarded. This is particularly important in light of ongoing reform of the Common Fisheries Policy and the forthcoming discard ban.</p> <p>The initial work considered porbeagle (<i>Lamna nasus</i>) and spurdog (<i>Squalus acanthias</i>) movements and survivability in order to support qualitative assessments of the vulnerability of these stocks to fisheries and inform discussions on options for technical measures, such as seasonal closures and gear modifications. Additional work was undertaken on the discard survival of a variety of skate species. The most recent work-strand, NEPTUNE, began in July 2012 and is due to report in 2015. This project is helping fisheries scientists and commercial fishermen work together in the south-west of England to collect more</p>
<p>B.</p> <p>Further research into the survivability of elasmobranchs should be undertaken.</p>	
<p>C.</p> <p>Further research should be undertaken into the areas, gear types and fishing methods that impact highly on Porbeagle and Spurdog, and</p>	

<p>look at potential mitigation measures.</p>	<p>robust data for a number of species including spurdog, porbeagle, and common skate (<i>Dipturus batis</i>).</p> <p>A parallel project has also been undertaken by Cefas in the East of England with the inshore fleet (southern North Sea). The Shark By-Watch project is funded through the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and shares similar aims of collaborating with fishermen to improve our understanding of elasmobranch movements and survivability in order to help ensure fisheries are sustainable.</p> <p>Further work on spurdog is planned in 2013 in response to the need for regionalisation under a reformed CFP and the discard ban. This work will require collaboration between Defra, Cefas, the fishing industry and NGOs.</p>
<p>D.</p> <p>Relevant management bodies and contracting parties should collect the best possible catch and landings data in all fisheries.</p>	<p>Recording of elasmobranch catch and landings data continues to improve, especially in regard to sharks where the generic 'SHA' code was only used on 7 occasions in 2012. There remain some difficulties with the use of the generic 'SKA' code for skates and rays; however this is a technical issue and discussions between operational staff in the UK and Belgium to resolve it are underway.</p> <p>The introduction of electronic logbooks has helped improve elasmobranch species recording for the over 15m vessels as only species specific codes are available. This will soon be the case for the over 12m vessels as well.</p> <p>The recording for under 10m vessels that do not have to complete log books remains challenging as sales notes have to be relied upon. Generic codes are still sometimes used however coastal officers have been actively following up on incorrect recordings as part of their routine enforcement activity and this has resulted in some noticeable improvements.</p>

Objective 3: International conservation bodies adopt and promote effective conservation measures for elasmobranchs.

- Elasmobranchs should be subject to careful management and appropriate conservation on a global basis through cooperation in the form of international conservation agreements.

Action required.	What we have done.
<p>A.</p> <p>CITES listing for those elasmobranch species under pressure and suffering depletion from international trade pressures.</p>	<p>The UK government has worked closely with important UK and international stakeholders to support and promote the listing of commercial marine species on CITES, putting significant effort into the recent CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP) held in Thailand in March 2013. The UK government identified the proposals to protect five species of shark (scalloped, great, and smooth hammerhead, oceanic whitetip, and porbeagle), two species of manta ray (oceanic and reef), and one species of sawfish (<i>Pristis microdon</i>) at the CoP as Ministerial priorities for CITES. We worked closely with other likeminded countries to secure success despite strong resistance from a number of countries.</p> <p>This historic decision now means that these species will be protected from unmanaged and unsustainable trade. The UK government, in conjunction with its countryside agencies (JNCC) and important stakeholders, will now work with other EU Member States and likeminded countries to implement these listings and pave the way for future listings of elasmobranch species.</p>
<p>B.</p> <p>Conservation of elasmobranch species in the North East Atlantic through the OSPAR</p>	<p>The UK continues to play an active and leading role in the Convention for the Protection of the marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR).</p> <p>The UK has supported the listing of a number of shark species on the OSPAR</p>

<p>Convention.</p>	<p>list of threatened and/or declining species and habitats in the North-East Atlantic, including Portuguese dogfish (<i>Centroscymnus coelolepis</i>), gulper shark (<i>Centrophorus granulosus</i>), leafscale gulper shark (<i>Centrophorus squamosus</i>), basking shark (<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>), porbeagle (<i>Lamna nasus</i>), spurdog (<i>Squalus acanthias</i>), and Angel shark (<i>Squatina squatina</i>).</p> <p>In addition, the UK supported a binding OSPAR Recommendation (2010/6) targeted at furthering the protection of the common skate complex (<i>Dipturus batis</i>), white skate (<i>Rostroraja alba</i>), angel shark (<i>Squatina squatina</i>) and basking shark (<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>), in the OSPAR maritime area.</p> <p>The UK will continue to actively engage in OSPAR and promote the improved conservation and management of elasmobranchs in the OSPAR maritime area.</p>
<p>C.</p> <p>The Convention on Migratory Sharks Memorandum of Understanding on the conservation of migratory sharks agreed upon in 2010 focuses its work on setting strong conservation measures for migratory sharks worldwide.</p>	<p>In June 2012 the UK became the 24th signatory to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on shark conservation agreed under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). This MoU is an important forum for working with other likeminded countries to improve global conservation and management of sharks and develop shared objectives to take into other important fora. The MoU was also signed on behalf of a number of UK overseas territories.</p> <p>In September 2012 the UK attended the First Meeting of the Signatories to the CMS Shark MoU. The UK delegation worked hard to secure a positive outcome and agree compromises that did not weaken or undermine the intention of the MoU. The crucial success was the agreement of an ambitious Conservation Plan. The UK has provided voluntary financial contributions to the Secretariat to help achieve the MoU commitments.</p> <p>The UK successfully nominated an expert from Cefas to sit on the MoU Advisory</p>

	<p>Committee, which was established at the first meeting of the Signatories. Furthermore we are co-chairing the Intersessional Working Group of the Signatories with the USA, which will discuss and propose solutions to outstanding issues such as those concerned with agreeing Rules of Procedure and establishing observer status.</p>
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Outcome 4: Increased understanding, education and awareness of elasmobranch issues.

- All of the measures proposed in this plan will be undertaken in a joined up manner, working in partnership with the fishing industry and Non Governmental Organisations, The following however will be key areas of partnership work that will be needed to meet the aims outlined in all of the previous objectives.

Action required.	What we have done.
<p>A.</p> <p>Educational initiatives such as ID guides should be developed further.</p>	<p>The UK government has provided financial and policy support to the Shark Trust in the production of the annual Commercial Fisheries Advisories. These advisories are produced as waterproof guides intended primarily to assist the commercial fishing industry and enforcement agencies by providing rapid access to the legislative status of sharks, skates and rays in UK and EU waters. They continue to prove very successful.</p> <p>In Conjunction with the Fisheries Advisories, The Shark Trust has also produced a number of identification guides for sharks, and skates and rays found in UK waters which are freely available.</p> <p>SEAFISH have also produced a number of guides to support the industry, in particular a guide for identifying skates, and rays and a guide for retailers on sustainability of stocks and responsible sourcing.</p> <p>Cefas scientists have provided input to the above, and also to recent identification guides for North Atlantic elasmobranchs produced by FAO.</p>
<p>B.</p> <p>Live release guidance is provided to the fishing industry</p>	<p>Handling and live release guidance for the recreational and commercial angling sectors has been produced by the Shark Trust. Furthermore, the annual commercial Fisheries Advisories provide information on which species of elasmobranch must be released as per national and EU legislation.</p>

Under the Cefas led NEPTUNE and [Shark By-Watch](#) projects, work is underway to develop best practice guides with the help of fishermen which will increase the survivability of discarded elasmobranchs and therefore improve the sustainability of the fisheries.

The UK Marine Management Organisation also produces [guidance](#) for commercial and recreational fishermen who may catch shark, skate and ray species. It provides details of what you can and cannot lawfully do with certain species that are protected by EU fisheries legislation, national, EU and international wildlife legislation and agreements

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