New Zealand Big Game Fishing Council

(Incorporated)

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MAKO SHARK AND PORBEAGLE SHARK

Background

1. Mako shark are an important target species for many of our clubs in the lower North Island. They used to be a reliable component of the summer sport fishing scene, particularly in areas such as Gisborne, Hawkes Bay, Wairarapa and New Plymouth. Further north large makos are targeted by some fishers in contests but generally they are a bycatch of the troll fishery for marlin and tuna.

2. Makos have been taken on rod and reel in New Zealand for many years. The predecessor of the Bay of Islands Swordfish Club, formed in 1924, was called the Bay of Islands Mako and Kingfish Club. Books such as Zane Grey's 'Tales of the Anglers Eldorado, New Zealand' (published in 1926) record many encounters with large mako sharks.

3. The recreational catch of Porbeagle sharks is mostly from South Island waters with an occasional catch recorded by northern clubs.

4. Over the last 15 years most of the mako sharks caught by recreational anglers are tagged and released as a means of recording the capture for the angler and to aid research into mako growth and movement.

Recreational catch

5. The total reported catch of Mako sharks by clubs affiliated to NZBGFC has declined dramatically in the last 9 seasons from 1693 fish in 1994-95 to a total of just 350 2002-03 (Table 1). This is an 80% drop in catch tallies. The decline has been most notable in the number of mako tagged and released and is mainly due to a decrease in the number of 20 kg to 60 kg mako sharks caught.

Table1. Combined mako catch of all NZBGFC affiliated clubs by season as published in NZBGFC year books.

Season	Weighed	Tagged	Total
1994-95	288	1405	1693
1995-96	424	1118	1542
1996-97	352	898	1250
1997-98	455	485	940
1998-99	320	709	1029
1999-00	338	323	661
2000-01	255	277	532
2001-02	155	282	437
2002-03	109	241	350

6. The significant decline in the availability of mako sharks is a major concern to our member clubs, especially in areas where they are considered a prime target species. In Gisborne and Hawkes Bay it is easy to blame the surface longliners because it seems that the whole fleet operate out of those two ports when the race for southern bluefin tuna starts. There also seem to be more large recreationally caught makos with longline hooks and trace in recent years (Colin Murray, Hawkes Bay Sport Fishing Club, pers comm.).

7. The recreational catch of porbeagle sharks in the NZBGFC records has fluctuated over the last 9 years and is much lower than the mako catch.

Commercial catch

8. The IPP outlines some of the problems associated with estimating the number of mako and porbeagle sharks caught each year. These include unspecified landed state (Fins, fillets or trunks), unspecified species, incorrect conversion factors for finned sharks and poor observer coverage. To that list MFish must add a significant amount of unreported shark fins sold for cash on the black market. We submit that it is almost impossible to estimate the commercial catch of makos or porbeagles in greenweight, therefore it is not worth discussing further.

9. What has been left out of the IPP is information on the fate of sharks caught on surface longlines. Observer records show that over 71% of mako sharks are alive when they arrive at the boat and that 80% of makos are retained or finned. Of the mako sharks processed on domestic vessels only 11% are used for their flesh.[1] Therefore, even if you assume that all dead makos are finned and only

[1] Francis, M.P. et al. 2000 Fish bycatch in New Zealand tuna longline fisheries, 1988-89 to 1997-98.

live makos are processed for their flesh, at least 45% of the thousands of makos caught each year reach the boat alive and are killed just for their fins.

10. Observer records show that over 60% of porbeagle sharks are alive when they arrive at the boat and that 78% of porbeagles are retained or finned and only 16% of retained or finned porbeagle sharks are processed for their flesh.[2] Therefore, even if you assume that all dead porbeagles are finned and only live porbeagles are processed for their flesh, at least 32% of all of the thousands of porbeagles caught each year reach the boat alive and are killed just for their fins.

11. The "bycatch" of sharks in the domestic fishery far outweighs the catch of target species. Mako and porbeagle sharks have exceptionally low reproductive potential. Allowing this huge bycatch to continue is in itself in conflict with the guiding principles, aims and objectives of the FAO International Plan for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks) that require a precautionary approach to management, and to minimize waste and discards from shark catches and promote their full use through measures including bans on finning.

12. MFish state in the IPP that a shark management plan in line with the IPOA-Sharks will be developed. The aim of the Shark Plan is to:

    - *'Ensure that shark catches from directed and non-directed fisheries are sustainable;*
    - *Assess threats to shark populations, determine and protect critical habitats and implement harvesting strategies consistent with the principles of biological sustainability and rational long-term economic use;*
    - *Identify and provide special attention, in particular to vulnerable or threatened shark stocks;*
    - *Improve and develop frameworks for establishing and co-ordinating effective consultation involving all stakeholders in research, management and educational initiatives within and between States;*
    - *Minimize unutilized incidental catches of sharks;*
    - *Contribute to the protection of biodiversity and ecosystem structure and function;*
    - ***Minimize waste and discards from shark catches in accordance with article 7.2.2.(g) of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (for example, requiring the retention of sharks from which fins are removed);***
    - ***Encourage full use of dead sharks;***
    - *Facilitate improved species-specific catch and landings data and monitoring of shark catches;*

[2] Francis, M.P. et al. 2000 Fish bycatch in New Zealand tuna longline fisheries, 1988-89 to 1997-98.

- *Facilitate the identification and reporting of species-specific biological and trade data.*[3]

13. Bans on the practice of shark finning have been implemented in the European Union, the United States of America, Canada and Australia. Other smaller Pacific states and territories including American Samoa have also banned shark finning. New Zealand is increasingly out of line with other countries.

14. Shark finning is grossly wasteful, with at least 98% of the shark body weight being discarded. It has become increasingly prevalent because of the extraordinary rise in price for the product in recent years.

15. White sharks are listed as an endangered species and will soon become a protected species in New Zealand waters. They are also in the same family (Lamnidae) as mako and porbeagle sharks. Is MFish able to guarantee that licensed fish receivers and MFish compliance staff can identify white shark fins from mako and porbeagle fins? Will they bother trying? The only way to be certain (other than expensive genetic testing) is to land sharks with their fins intact.

16. NZBGFC supports the proposal to list mako and porbeagle on the sixth Schedule of the Fisheries Act (1996) to permit the release of sharks of any size as long as they are likely to survive. The Ministry should also discuss with stakeholders the costs and benefits of a minimum legal size for commercial and non commercial mako and porbeagle and possibly the benefits of a maximum legal size for commercial fishers to protect the reproductive potential of the population.

Summary

17. Combined club records show a marked decline in recreational mako shark catch over the last seven years. This coincides with the expansion of the domestic surface longline fleet in northern New Zealand which catch more sharks than target species. It is obvious to us that the surface longline fleet has depleted shark populations in New Zealand.

18. The NZBGFC urges the Ministry of Fisheries to take heed of our international obligations and developments in other nations, and ban shark finning. Sharks should be landed only with their fins intact. This will provide an incentive for fishers to fully utilize their shark bycatch, or release it alive. The sale of shark fins should not be permitted to temporarily sustain the tuna longline fishery at the expense of shark populations, if the tuna fishery is inherently uneconomic.

[3] Implementation of the IPOA-sharks, section 7. FAO website

19. There is obviously a market for shark flesh as 10% to 20% of sharks are processed for flesh now. The proportion is even higher on Japanese charter vessels.

20. Given international trends and treaties it is not a matter of if a ban on finning sharks at sea will be required but a matter of when it will be enforced in New Zealand. MFish and the Minister should be considering the issue of having to compensate shark quota holders when finning at sea is banned before over allocating shark quota to surface longliners at this time.

21. We have to ask, how can the Ministry manage a species under the QMS when they have no idea of how many tonnes of mako, porbeagle or white shark are caught each year? Now is a good time to start research and active management of commercial shark catch. There has been a glaring need for better observer coverage of the domestic surface longline fleet for 5 years now. It is coming, we are told. NZBGFC urge the Minister to ensure that it happens.

22. The whole culture of the surface line fishery of the, last frontier, open access, wild west, gold rush, has contributed to the development in a large black market for shark fins and disregard for the law on targeting swordfish by many fishers. We ask that MFish become more active to ensure compliance and accurate reporting under the QMS.

23. Surface longlining can be a very wasteful method that targets a few high value tuna species while discarding the majority of their catch by weight. There are a number of bycatch issues that commercial fishers need to deal with: seabirds; marine mammals; marlin; turtles and sharks. It is not enough for the Minister to set a TAC and TACC for sharks and claim that he or she is managing the shark fishery effectively. Shark finning at sea needs to be prohibited and the Adaptive Management Programme used to set environmental and data collection standards for any expansion of shark catch.

BLUE SHARK

Background

1. NZBGFC members target blue sharks off the east coast of the South Island and in some other locations They are recognised by the International Game Fishing Association as a sport fish but they are not highly regarded as a catch and most are tagged and released. NZBGFC publish the catch tallies for each affiliated club in their yearbook (table 1). Over the seven seasons 1996-97 through 2002-03 there has been a significant decline in the number of blue sharks tagged and the number weighed (to qualify at the weigh station they must be above the NZBGFC minimum weight of 50 kg). Over this period 75% of blue sharks have been tagged and released. An unknown number have been released without being tagged.

Table1. Combined blue shark catch of all NZBGFC affiliated clubs by season as published in NZBGFC year books.

Season	Weighed	Tagged	Total
1996-97	114	268	382
1997-98	177	749	926
1998-99	70	273	343
1999-00	79	247	326
2000-01	54	182	236
2001-02	100	98	198
2002-03	30	63	93

Commercial catch

2. The IPP outlines some of the problems associated with estimating the number of blue sharks caught each year. These include unspecified landed state (Fins, fillets or trunks), unspecified species, incorrect conversion factors for finned sharks and poor observer coverage. To that list MFish must add a significant amount of unreported shark fins sold for cash on the black market. We submit that it is almost impossible to estimate the commercial catch of makos or porbeagles in greenweight, therefore it is not worth discussing further.

3. Observer records show that over 86% of blue sharks are alive when they arrive at the boat and that 80% of blue sharks are retained or finned and less than 1% of retained or finned blue sharks are processed for their flesh.[4] Therefore, even if you assume that all dead blue sharks are finned and only live sharks are processed for their flesh, two thirds (66%) of all of the tens of

[4] Francis, M.P. et al. 2000 Fish bycatch in New Zealand tuna longline fisheries, 1988-89 to 1997-98.

thousands of blue sharks caught each year reach the boat alive and are killed just for their fins.

4. In 1997-98 scaled estimate of surface longline blue shark catch was 45,000 fish, while southern bluefin numbered about 4000 and bigeye tuna under 3000. That same season the number of blue shark reported by commercial fishers was about 15,000.[3] While 20% of the catch that was discarded would not be recorded we are left wondering what happened to the 21,000 unrecorded blue sharks. What happened to their fins?

5. Allowing this huge bycatch to continue is in itself in conflict with the guiding principles, aims and objectives of the FAO International Plan for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks) that require a precautionary approach to management, and to minimize waste and discards from shark catches and promote their full use through measures including bans on finning.

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