

# Progress made on protecting sharks, groups say

November 28 2010, By ANGELA DOLAND , Associated Press

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Tuna balloons are displayed by World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) members in Paris, Friday, Nov. 26, 2010. Conservation group WWF teamed up with supermarket chains and restaurants Wednesday to press countries to set stricter fishing regulations for Atlantic bluefin tuna during an international conference in Paris. (AP Photo/Jacques Brinon)

(AP) -- An international conservation conference in Paris made progress Saturday on protecting sharks but didn't do anything to save the Atlantic bluefin tuna, which has been severely overfished to feed the market for sushi in Japan, environmental groups said.

Delegates from 48 nations spent 11 days in Paris haggling over fishing quotas for the Atlantic and Mediterranean, poring over scientific data and pitting the demands of environmentalists against those of the fishing industry.

Conservation groups said delegates took steps in the right direction with moves to protect oceanic whitetip sharks and many hammerheads in the Atlantic, though they had hoped for more. Sharks were once an accidental catch for fishermen but have been increasingly targeted because of the growing market in Asia for their fins, an expensive delicacy used in soup.

WWF, [Greenpeace](#), Oceana and the Pew Environment Group all strongly criticized the 2011 bluefin quotas set by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, or ICCAT, which manages tuna in the Atlantic and Mediterranean as well as species that have traditionally been accidental catches for tuna fishermen.

Environmental groups had hoped to see bluefin fishing slashed or suspended, saying illegal fishing is rampant in the Mediterranean and that scientists don't have good enough data to evaluate the problem.

The commission agreed to cut the bluefin fishing quota in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean from 13,500 to 12,900 metric tons annually - about a 4 percent reduction. It also agreed on measures to try to improve enforcement of quotas on bluefin, prized for its tender red meat.

Sergi Tudela, head of WWF Mediterranean's fisheries program, attacked the "measly quota reduction." Oliver Knowles, Greenpeace oceans campaigner, complained that "the word 'conservation' should be removed from ICCAT's name."

Russell F. Smith, representing the U.S. delegation, told The AP, "I think we made some progress. I wish we'd made more."

Meanwhile, the CNPMM French [fishing industry](#) union praised the decision, saying "reason prevailed."

The international commission's committee of scientists had said keeping the status quo was acceptable, but environmentalists say there is so much unreported fishing that doing so is irresponsible.

Japan buys nearly 80 percent of the annual Atlantic bluefin catch. Top-grade sushi with fatty bluefin can go for as much as 2,000 yen (\$24) a piece in high-end Tokyo restaurants.

While the focus of the Paris meeting was tuna, sharks have become a growing concern. Environmentalists say there are disastrously inadequate rules on shark capture.

Although there are elaborate international fishing regulations and quotas for other types of fish, sharks have long been an afterthought, even though some species have declined by 99 percent, Oceana said.

The international commission banned fishermen from catching and retaining oceanic whitetip sharks. It voted to limit the catch of several types of hammerhead sharks and to require countries to keep data on shortfin mako sharks.

Delegates also decided that Atlantic fishermen will now be required to carry special gear to remove hooks from sea turtles.

While the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas and other regional commissions regulate fishing, trade bans are handled by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, or CITES. [Environmentalists](#) were sorely disappointed by a meeting of that body in March, where Atlantic bluefin and six species of [sharks](#) failed to get protection.

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Citation: Progress made on protecting sharks, groups say (2010, November 28) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-sharks-groups.html>

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