



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Luxembourg, 6 June 2013
10419/13
PRESSE 232

"Shark finning": The Council regulates against the practice

Today, the Council adopted an amending regulation on the removal of fins of sharks on board vessels following a first reading agreement with the European Parliament ([76/12](#)). This text aims to eliminate existing derogations to the ban on "shark finning". The Portuguese and Spanish delegations voted against and made a joint declaration ([9692/1/13 REV 1 ADD 1 REV 1](#)).

The position of the European Parliament at first reading was adopted in November 2012 and a corrigendum to that position was adopted in May this year. The regulation should be applicable once it has been formally signed and published in the Official Journal.

The controversial practice of "shark finning" (whereby the fins are removed from sharks, with the remainder of the shark being discarded at sea) has been forbidden on EU fishing vessels since 2003. However, a derogation remains in force that allows special fishing permits to be issued for on-board processing, whereby shark fins can be removed from the carcasses (with the fins and the remainder of the shark being landed together or separately). The Commission proposal aims to eliminate this derogation so that sharks can only be landed with their fins attached.

Sharks, skates and rays are generally very vulnerable to overexploitation owing to their life cycle characteristics of slow growth, late maturity and small number of young. In recent years, some shark populations have been severely targeted and put under serious threat as a result of a dramatic increase in demand for shark products, and fins in particular, which are used in soups and traditional cures in Asia. While the practice of shark finning is forbidden in EU waters and on EU vessels, the fact that on-board processing is still possible has cast doubts on the effectiveness of controls - which rely on carcass-to-fin weight ratios - and hinders improved landing statistics, the latter being necessary to allow for science-based management of shark species. With its policy of fins remaining attached, the EU will also be in a better position to push for shark protection at international level.

P R E S S

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The Member States consider that EU fisheries policies should be based on scientific advice. In this specific case, the Scientific, Technical, and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) has confirmed the appropriateness of a finning ban, and has called for more accurate shark landings statistics; the most straight-forward way to achieve this is by landing sharks together with their fins. The STECF is the scientific body that assists the EU in the implementation of the CFP in the fields of marine biology, marine ecology, fisheries science, fishing gear technology and fishery economics.
