

International Meeting on Protection of Sharks

By RCN/MinLNV Netherlands

From November 20-24th, 2017 a group of international shark experts gathered at Captain Don's Habitat on Bonaire to discuss measures for the international protection of sharks. Countries ranging from the Philippines to Saudi Arabia, from the United States to Australia and from Costa Rica to Chile have sent experts to Bonaire for an advisory meeting of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (Sharks MOU) under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

The meeting brought together both the Advisory Committee and the Conservation Working Group of the Sharks MOU, to discuss what shark or ray species need more protection internationally, how they can best be protected, how to cooperate with fisheries organizations and how to build capacity for better shark protection. They formulated recommendations for the Meeting of Signatories, which will take the final decisions.

The Netherlands is one of 41 signatories to the Sharks MOU; the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food quality (LNV) hosted this workshop on Bonaire in order to help profile Bonaire as a shark

friendly island and "green destination" and also to promote the Sharks MOU in the Caribbean region, where there are still relatively few signatories. Bonaire has been protecting sharks since 2008 because of their importance to its dive tourism and in 2015 also joined in the Yarari Sanctuary for marine mammals and sharks, comprising the waters of Bonaire and Saba. The Tourism Corporation Bonaire (TCB) supported the meeting and welcomed the participants at a cocktail party on Monday evening.

The Sharks MOU is the first global instrument for the conservation of migratory species of sharks. Sharks are under serious threat around the globe. At present time, it is estimated that one-quarter of shark and ray species are threatened worldwide. The number of sharks being killed every year ranges between 63 and 273 million individuals.

The MOU is a legally non-binding international instrument within the framework of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). It aims to achieve and maintain a favorable conservation status for migratory sharks based on the best available scientific information and taking into account the socio-economic value of these

species for the people in various countries. Currently 29 species of sharks are listed in Annex I of the MOU.

The Netherlands has taken an active role in the Sharks MoU, and with the Caribbean Netherlands the Netherlands is a range state for numerous migratory shark species. Sharks are an important attractor for dive tourism. Dive tourism is the economic mainstay for Bonaire, which is why the island decided to protect all sharks almost ten years ago already. More recently both Bonaire and Saba requested the Netherlands to establish a sanctuary for both sharks and marine mammals in the water so the islands as well as in the waters of the adjoining Exclusive Economic Zone. As a result, the Yarari Sanctuary was established in 2015 which will help to improve protection of in particular migratory sharks.

Cooperating partners

The Dutch Elasmobranch Society (NEV), the partner organization of DCNA's Save Our Sharks in the Netherlands, signed an agreement this week making them an official 'cooperating partner' of the Sharks MOU. Cooperating partners are asked to use their network and expertise to help attain the objectives of the MOU.

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