

Press Release

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Australia joins unprecedented effort for international shark and ray trade measures *Native sawfish among eleven shark and ray species proposed under wildlife treaty*

Sydney, Australia. October 11, 2012. Australia has joined 37 other countries in proposing protections for shark and ray species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Australia is pursuing an end to all commercial international trade in the Critically Endangered freshwater sawfish through CITES Appendix I. Less restrictive trade measures through Appendix II are being proposed by various other CITES Parties for the oceanic whitetip shark, three species of hammerheads, porbeagle shark, both manta rays, and three freshwater stingrays. CITES Parties will debate and vote on listing proposals in March 2013 in Bangkok.

"We are pleased that Australia is among the 38 countries proposing to use CITES to address pressing trade-related threats to sharks and rays," said Ania Budziak, Associate Director for Science and Policy at Project AWARE. "Divers are uniquely positioned to highlight the economic benefits of ensuring healthy populations of these iconic species."

CITES is an international agreement for monitoring and controlling international trade to ensure it does not threaten species' survival. While CITES Appendix I effectively bans international commercial trade, Appendix II prompts export permits to ensure international trade is legal and sustainable.

In 2007, all seven sawfish species were listed under CITES. All but the freshwater sawfish were added to Appendix I, due to Australian interest in trading live animals (under Appendix II). In 2011, the Australian government concluded that take from their freshwater sawfish population for export might be detrimental to the recovery of the species.

The freshwater sawfish has been reported in rivers and coastal waters in Australia, Southeast Asia, and southeastern Africa. All sawfish species are classified as Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Sawfish face myriad threats; trade in their valuable fins for shark fin soup and their long, toothed snouts for curios has contributed to declines.

"The strongest protections at all levels are needed to ensure the survival of sawfishes," Alexia Wellbelove, Senior Program Manager for Humane Society International. "We urge all CITES Parties to support Australia's freshwater sawfish proposal to strengthen existing international safeguards for all sawfish species and offer new hope for bringing these remarkable animals back from the brink of extinction."

Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, Ecuador, Honduras, Croatia, and the 27 Member States of the European Union have proposed CITES Appendix II listing for scalloped, great, and smooth hammerhead sharks. Colombia. The U.S. and Brazil have joined Colombia's effort to also list the oceanic whitetip shark. All four of these shark species can be found off Australia.

"The global trade in shark fins for soup is a major factor in the worldwide decline of most shark species, particularly hammerheads and oceanic whitetips," said Sonja Fordham, President of Shark Advocates International. "Support from Australia will be key to the success of the shark proposals at the CITES meeting, and – in turn – to a brighter future for several globally threatened species."

Notes to Editors:

Project AWARE Foundation is a global movement of scuba divers protecting our ocean planet - one dive at a time. Focused on the critical issues of Sharks in Peril and Marine Debris, Project AWARE empowers thousands of divers in more than 180 countries to work together for a clean, healthy and abundant ocean planet. Project AWARE Foundation is a registered non-profit organization with offices in Australia, United Kingdom and the United States.

Shark Advocates International (SAI) is a project of The Ocean Foundation formed to advance sound conservation policies for sharks and rays. SAI works to secure science-based limits on shark fishing and trade, protection for endangered species, and stronger bans on finning.

Humane Society International (HSI) concentrates on the preservation of endangered animals and ecosystems and works to ensure quality of life for all animals, both domestic and wild. HSI is the largest animal protection not-for-profit organization in the world, with over 10 million supporters globally and has been established in Australia since 1994.

Project AWARE, SAI and Humane Society International are collaborating with Wildlife Conservation Society, Shark Trust, and the German Elasmobranch Society to promote CITES listings for sharks and rays.

This information is based on a provisional list posted by CITES. The final list is anticipated within days.

The porbeagle proposal comes from the EU and is cosponsored by Brazil, Comoros, Croatia, and Egypt. Ecuador, in cooperation with Brazil and Colombia, has put forth the mantas, while Colombia has proposed the three freshwater stingrays.

Porbeagle sharks are prized for their meat as well as fins. Manta rays are increasingly targeted for their gill rakers, which are used in Chinese medicine. Freshwater stingrays are traded for display in aquariums.

Scalloped and great hammerheads are classified by IUCN as globally Endangered. The oceanic whitetip shark, porbeagle, both manta rays, and the smooth hammerhead are listed by IUCN as globally Vulnerable. The freshwater stingrays are considered Data Deficient.