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« SHARKS AND HUMANS : HOW TO REINFORCE THE PARTNERSHIP ? »

A regional workshop under French agencies funding, entitled ‘Sharks and Humans: how to reinforce the partnership ?’, was organized by the Institute of the Coral Reefs of the Pacific (IRCP) in Moorea, French Polynesia (07-13 October 2014) from funding of the Fond Pacifique and the Ministry for Environment, Sustainable Development and Energy of France. A set of 25 international and national experts (including professionals, NGOs, scientists and CROP agencies) debated and defined the core priorities to be addressed as soon as possible for ensuring the conservation and sustainable management of shark and ray populations in the Pacific. The conclusions addressed to policy and decision-makers are listed here below.

A - General statements / Take-home message

- 1- Healthy and productive oceans need sharks.**
- 2- **In the Pacific region**, a live shark has higher social, cultural and often economic value than a dead shark.
- 3- Many sharks and rays have disappeared from Pacific regions.**
- 4- Overfishing is the major factor contributing to population depletion.
- 5- Many sharks have reached critically low numbers and inaction is not an option – Time is running out.**
- 6- There is an urgent need for improved and effective management, regulation and enforcement of fisheries affecting shark populations.**
- 7- The immediate goal is to urgently reduce mortality to sustainable levels.**

B- Statements related to “Conservation – Sanctuaries”

- 1- Data show that sharks and rays are not able to keep pace with existing exploitation levels.
- 2- A range of management options is available, including shark sanctuaries.
- 3- A shark sanctuary can be effective if it
 - a. Reduces total shark mortality, including cryptic mortality
 - b. Recognizes and preserves the ecosystem role of sharks
 - c. Protects critical habitats for shark populations
 - d. Generates data that can be used to evaluate the sanctuary’s effectiveness in reducing shark mortality
 - e. Can be practically enforced with a strong ownership by stakeholders
 - f. Allows for continual improvement/adaptive management, and moves toward efficiency and effectiveness
 - g. Encourages connectivity between MPAs or MMAs for migratory species
 - h. Equalizes or reverses the burden of proof on fishing activities
 - i. Alleviates disproportionate burden of conservation and management on SIDS and their populations

C- Statement related to “shark and rays fisheries”

- 1- The demand for shark and ray products is growing.
- 2- Although there are indicators that the trade in shark fins may be decreasing, shark meat markets are growing.
- 3- Recent management changes (CITES, WCPFC) for Pacific open ocean shark and tuna fisheries are welcomed, but these changes need to be properly implemented, monitored and evaluated for its effectiveness.
- 4- Pacific coastal shark and ray fisheries (local consumption and export) are not being properly addressed, and further work is needed to assess and manage these fisheries.

- 5- Targeted fishing for sharks (e.g. shark lines) should only be allowed for species and fisheries that are demonstrably sustainable.
- 6- Special focus should target reduction of by-catches (accidental catches)
- 7- New technologies (e-monitoring, satellites, drone) are essential for better monitoring of catches that should be species-specific.
- 8- Quotas and catch-limits are already in some parts of the Pacific and should be more widely considered.
- 9- Enforcement of regulation at port and banning transshipment at sea are also cost effective measures to better implement.

D- Statements related to “eco-tourism”

- 1- Eco-tourism has been demonstrated to be a successful alternative use of sharks and rays in several countries of the Pacific.
- 2- The benefits need to be shared appropriately amongst all stakeholders.
- 3- The advantages of shark and ray eco-tourism include: economic benefits, conservation, connection with nature, improving public perception of sharks and rays, data collection and research, ...
- 4- Possible negative effects of shark and ray tourism include impacts on: health of the animals, animal behaviour, changes safety of people, and ecosystem functioning...
- 5- Guidelines and standards are needed to improve management of shark and ray eco-tourism.
- 6- If guidelines are properly implemented, the advantages of shark and ray tourism override the potential negative effects.

E – Statements related to “cultural values”

- 1- Pacific peoples have important cultural values associated with sharks and rays and these values should be considered in shark management and conservation.
- 2- Cultural values can help to motivate or reinforce conservation efforts as well as encourage sustainable practices.
- 3- Effort should be dedicate to provide local communities with updated scientific knowledge aiming at better understanding the threats to sharks and rays.
- 4- Cultural values of sharks and rays should be included in tourist education and experiences, but only when done in accordance with the protocols of the traditional peoples who own these stories and cultural information.

F – Statement related to “public action”

- 1- Citizen science may be an useful tool for conservation, given the objectives and expected outcomes are carefully defined, the methodology is consistent, and the limitations of the data collected are acknowledge.

- 2- The concept of “social license to operate” (community acceptance of fishing and shark and ray tourism) may be a valuable tool that can influence industry and decision-makers.
- 3- The concept of “social license to operate” should be explored and encouraged to promote shark and ray conservation.

G- Statement related to the “image of sharks”

- 1- The negative image of sharks amongst the general public must be improved in order to influence community behaviour and political decision-making.
- 2- Scientists and dive operators need to exercise caution to ensure that their involvement and contributions are constructive and presented properly, and they should refuse to participate in media projects that convey sensationalist, false or misleading messages.
- 3- The tourism industry, including dive operators, should be encouraged to present appropriate shark conservation messages to tourists and divers.