

Fishing Vessel Circular Letter No. 050

31 August 2023

Series: RFMO-2023

To: All Ship Owners, Operators, Deputy Registrars, Resident Agents, Representatives, and other Stakeholders

Subject: **Conservation of Silky Sharks Caught in Association with ICCAT and IATTC Fisheries**

Reference: Issued in accordance with Part VIII, Section 50(1)(c) of the High Seas Fishing Act, 2013

Circular Superseded: FVC-12/03 – Conservation of Silky Sharks in the Atlantic Ocean
FVC-015/2016 – Conservation Measures for Shark Species with Special Emphasis on Silky Sharks

BACKGROUND:

Silky sharks are a species of shark that is widely distributed throughout the world's ocean, including the waters regulated by several RFMOs including ICCAT and IATTC to which Belize subscribes. This species has been ranked as the species with the highest degree of vulnerability in the 2010 ecological risk assessment for Atlantic Sharks. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has listed this species in Appendix II of the Convention which means that their international trade is regulated to ensure that it is sustainable and does not threaten their survival in the wild.

MEASURES ADOPTED BY BELIZE

International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)

Belize flagged fishing vessels operating in the ICCAT area shall ensure to release all those silky sharks weather dead or alive, and prohibit retaining on board, transshipping, or landing any part or whole carcass of silky shark.

Vessels shall promptly release silky sharks unharmed, at the latest before putting the catch into the fish holds, giving due consideration to the safety of the crew members. Purse seine vessels shall endeavour to take additional measures to increase the survival rate of the silky sharks incidentally caught.

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)

Vessels shall prohibit retaining on board, transshipping, landing, or storing, in part or whole, carcasses of silky sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) caught by purse-seine vessels in the IATTC Convention Area.

Purse seine vessels shall release silky sharks whenever possible. However, if silky sharks are caught unintentionally and frozen as part of the purse seine vessel's operation the silky shark shall be surrendered to the authorities at the port of discharge. Any whole shark surrendered shall not be sold or bartered but may be donated for domestic consumption. All sharks surrendered shall be reported.

Long line vessels not authorized to target sharks but catch it incidentally shall limit bycatch of this specie to 20% of the total catch by fishing trip in weight. Vessels engaged in multi-species fisheries using surface longlines¹ shall limit the catch of silky shark to less than 100 cm total length to 20% of the total number of silky sharks caught during the trip.

For those multispecies fisheries using surface longliners that have captured more than 20% of silky sharks in weight on average a year, it shall be prohibited from using steel leaders during a period of three consecutive months each year.

APPLICABILITY

This circular applies to all Belize flagged vessel engaged in fishing or fishing related activities or intending to operate under the Belize flag.

MAINTENANCE

Stakeholders shall ensure that this Circular is acknowledged and observed.

COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

Failure to comply with any Circular shall result in disciplinary actions taken in accordance with Belize's Sanction Regulations S.I. 32 of 2014

IMPLEMENTATION

This Circular shall be implemented with forthwith.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information direct all inquiries about this Circular to the Director of High Seas Fisheries of the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit, Ministry of Finance, Government of Belize.

Issued by

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¹ For the purposes of this circular and in accordance with the corresponding IATTC Resolution, surface longlines are those in which the majority of hooks fish at depths shallower than 100 meters and target species other than swordfish.