



Press Release - Embargoed 10am GMT, 27th January 2010

SHARK ALLIANCE DELIVERS EUROPEAN CITIZENS' PLEA TO SPAIN
CHANGE COURSE ON SHARK FINNING RULES

MADRID (27.01.10): Representatives from the Shark Alliance, an international shark conservation coalition, today delivered to Spanish authorities a petition signed by over 90,000 citizens from 16 European countries urging Spain to end its opposition to improving the EU ban on finning - cutting off a shark's fins and discarding its body at sea – and lead the EU toward a more effective finning regulation.

“Public sentiment is continuing to turn in favour of sharks,” said Sonja Fordham, European Shark policy director for the Pew Environment Group and the Shark Alliance. “Our petition should send a clear message to the Spanish government that citizens all across Europe urgently want better protections for these vulnerable animals.”

For many years, Spain has ranked first in Europe for shark catches and has worked to obstruct the adoption of tighter rules on shark finning. The widely supported 2009 European Community Plan of Action for Sharks includes a pledge to strengthen the EU finning regulation. Holding the EU Presidency until July 2010, Spain is likely to preside over deliberations concerning these changes.

“As Europe's top shark fishing nation, Spain has a responsibility to lead rather than impede shark conservation,” said Àlex Bartolí, Shark Alliance policy coordinator for Spain. “We call on Spanish government to ensure that Spain stops hindering finning ban enforcement efforts and instead supports the European Commission’s initiatives to responsibly limit shark fishing.”

The 2009 European Shark Week, held in October 2009, was sponsored by the Save Our Seas Foundation. Dive groups, aquariums and conservation organisations across Europe hosted more than 300 events to raise awareness of the sharks’ plight and collect signatures for the petition.

José María Aguilar, president of the Iberian Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AIZA) added, “All year long, we see the growing concern for sharks first hand through the visitors to our aquariums. Today, we are honoured to convey their message directly to the Spanish government, along with our hope for a better future for our magnificent sharks.”

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Spain is one of only two EU countries to issue permits that allow fishermen to remove shark fins at sea. Although shark bodies must be retained under these permits, at-sea fin removal creates enforcement challenges that can enable finning to take place undetected.

Spain has acted as a leader by becoming the first EU Member State to fully protect all species of hammerhead and thresher sharks, many of which are considered threatened.

The **Shark Alliance** is a global, not-for-profit coalition of 76 conservation, scientific and recreational organizations dedicated to improving shark conservation policies. Spanish members of the Shark Alliance include CRAM Foundation, Ecologistas en Acción, Kenna Ecodiving, OCEANIA diving world and SUBMON.

The Shark Alliance was initiated and is coordinated by the **Pew Environment Group**, the conservation arm of The Pew Charitable Trusts, a non-government organisation that is working to end overfishing in the world's oceans

The **Save Our Seas Foundation**, European Shark Week's sponsor, is a non-profit organisation that establishes and supports scientific research and educational projects focused on the need to protect our world's oceans. Its initiatives provide key information about the importance of maintaining the delicate ecological balance in marine ecosystems. In particular, SOSF aims to learn more about the role sharks and rays play as top predators and the devastating consequences of removing them from our seas.

Mr. Bartolí is the author of the 2009 SUBMON publication, *SPAIN: A driving force in shark fishing around the world*, available at www.sharkalliance.org.