

Response Statement - Basking Shark, Atlantic population

December 2, 2010

Common Name: Basking Shark, Atlantic population

Scientific Name: *Cetorhinus maximus*

Status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): Special Concern

How the Minister of the Environment intends to respond to the assessment: The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will undertake consultations with the governments of Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, Aboriginal peoples, stakeholders, and the public on whether or not the Basking Shark, Atlantic population, should be added to the *List of Wildlife Species at Risk* (Schedule 1) under the *Species at Risk Act* as Special Concern. The Minister of the Environment will forward the COSEWIC assessment of the Basking Shark, Atlantic population, to the Governor in Council upon completion of consultations.

Once a species has been assessed by COSEWIC, further steps must be undertaken before it is added to Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. For more information on this process, please view [The Species Listing Process Under SARA](#).

Reason(s) for status designation provided by COSEWIC: This species, which attains a maximum length of over 15 m (the second-largest living fish) is highly vulnerable to human-caused mortality because of its extremely low productivity. Females mature at 16 to 20 years old, gestate for 2.6 to 3.5 years (the longest known gestation period of any vertebrate), and produce litters of about 6 offspring. Based on recent tagging information, individuals in Canada are considered to be part of an Atlantic population shared with the USA, Europe, the Caribbean and northern South America. Population estimates in Canadian waters have large uncertainties and may number between 4918-10125 individuals. Population estimates outside Canadian waters are not available. Information from surveys along the Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to Florida indicates no decline over the past two decades. However, available information suggests substantial population declines in the northeast Atlantic. The species is caught incidentally in trawl, longline, and gillnet fisheries in Atlantic Canada. Removals in fisheries with observer coverage have decreased since the 1980s consistent with a reduction in fishing effort, but information on bycatch from other fisheries is not available. There is no evidence of recovery following declines associated with fisheries in other parts of the range. Ship collisions are an additional threat.

Occurrence: Atlantic Ocean

Competent Minister(s):

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

Province(s) and territory (territories) to be consulted:

Newfoundland and Labrador

New Brunswick

Nova Scotia

Prince Edward Island

Applicable federal legislation: Fisheries are managed and fish habitat is protected under the *Fisheries Act*.

Conservation activities underway: Basking shark is currently managed under the *Fisheries Act*. The species is not subject to a commercial fishery and Basking Shark caught incidentally as by-catch may not be retained in any fishery. DFO Science has attempted to attach satellite tags to Basking Sharks multiple times since 2007. One individual was successfully tagged and monitored in 2009.