



Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources, and Agriculture

Male', Republic of Maldives

MEDIA STATEMENT

**Translation of the Press Statement issued on 23rd March 2021
Unlawful harvesting and trading of sharks in the Maldives**

It has come to our attention that there are ongoing illegal shark fishery and trade practices in the Maldives and that shark products are being traded and exported through a black market. Following these reports, the Ministry has consulted with relevant stakeholder agencies and have implemented management measures and enhanced monitoring and enforcement systems to deter such illegal activities. To this end, mechanisms have been established to inspect and conduct spot checks of export consignments, and the Maldives Police Service and the Coast Guard have strengthened their patrolling in areas that have been observed and reported as prime shark fishing grounds. The Ministry has also made arrangements for an efficient flow of reported information to relevant agencies and to administer penalties for offenders.

In these efforts, an attempted illegal export of a consignment of shark fins was seized by the Maldives Customs Service and Aviation Security Command in January 2021. Investigations have been held and the Ministry as well as the Maldives Customs Service are currently proceeding with the administration of penalties to ensure accountability. In addition, on 22nd March 2021, a fishing vessel belonging to South Ari Atoll was apprehended by the Maldives Police Service, with a substantial number of sharks onboard. This case is currently being investigated by the Maldives Police Service and the Ministry will work with them to take appropriate action against the offenders.

Sharks play a crucial role in sustaining the two most important economic sectors of the Maldives, namely the tourism and the tuna fishery sector. Following serious concerns regarding the status of shark stocks in Maldivian waters, harvesting of sharks was banned in the Maldives in 2010. Since then, the ban on shark fishery and trade, including export, has been reinforced in the General Fisheries Regulation of the Maldives (Regulation No: 2020/R-75), which was enacted pursuant to the Fisheries Act of the Maldives (Act no. 14/2019). Effective implementation and enforcement of this new Fisheries Act and its pursuant regulations is a major objective of the Ministry and given that all species of sharks are fully protected under the General Fisheries Regulation of the Maldives, the Ministry will ensure that appropriate action is taken against any parties practising unlawful harvesting, processing or exporting of sharks or shark products.

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