

Peru Bans Dolphin Killing Harpoon and Landing of Shark Fins

NGOs welcome recent steps in the right direction but call for strict controls and enforcement

Wädenswil, Switzerland/St. Augustine, USA/Lima, Peru, December 19th, 2016. The Peruvian Ministry of Production has banned the notorious harpoons used in the artisanal longline fishery to kill dolphins for shark bait. Video evidence of the use of these harpoons was obtained by Stefan Austermühle of the Peruvian marine conservation group Mundo Azul. The government has also banned the landing of shark fins to discourage shark finning. A coalition of marine conservation organisations including OceanCare (Switzerland), BlueVoice (USA) and Mundo Azul (Peru) welcome these recent steps but call for strict implementation, controls and stiff penalties. OceanCare will submit a petition to the new Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski.

While Peruvian legislation makes it a criminal offense to harm dolphins and other cetacean species in Peruvian waters, fishermen operating far off the coast kill dolphins with little fear of being caught. The Peruvian Ministry of Production has passed a regulation that prohibits the possession and use of fishing gear known as „animal harpoon“ through Supreme Decree No. 021-2016-PRODUCE, published in the official newspaper *El Peruano* on November 2, 2016. Mundo Azul, together with its partner organisations OceanCare and BlueVoice has been instrumental in exposing the fact that such hand-held harpoons have been widely misused for the illegal capture of dolphins for shark bait.

“It has taken three years of continued efforts of civil society to achieve this harpoon ban. Since the deadly device is the only way dolphin can be hunted, this constitutes an overdue measure toward halting the slaughter of up to 15,000 dolphins a year, ending immeasurable suffering. We commend the Peruvian government on taking this step in the right direction,” says Sigrid Lüber, president of OceanCare.

The killing of dolphins for shark bait is being carried out by a fleet of at least 500 small-scale longline shark fishing boats that operate along the entire Peruvian coast and even venture far out into international waters. “With a small device such as the tip of a harpoon that can easily be hidden in a pocket and a coastline of 2,500km, a translation of the ban into an actual law, strict implementation, regular controls and stiff penalties against violations are crucial; otherwise, this regulation remains a paper tiger – toothless and ineffectual,” adds Lüber. OceanCare will submit a petition to the Peruvian president Pedro Pablo Kuczynski to this effect, also requesting to pass an overdue temporary ban on shark fishing.

In addition to the dolphin slaughter that could now potentially be prevented, a second one remains – the killing of sharks. Shark fisheries in Peru are also in violation of Peru’s legislation, as 95% of the sharks caught are juveniles, bringing the stocks to the brink of extinction.

To address the overexploitation of shark stocks, Peru’s Ministry of Production also bans the landing of loose shark fins, mandating that the sharks must be landed whole, with the presence of head and all its fins adhered to the body. With this regulation, the government seeks to prevent shark finning, illegal transshipment at sea or illegal trade with loose fins, thus promoting the full use of the resource.

“Unfortunately, this ban on loose shark fin landing does not address the real problem. Our investigations have shown that sharks are not only being caught for their fins, they are historically caught for their meat for local consumption. Hence, the bodies are not being discarded at sea but landed and the fins, as valuable by-product, cut-off ashore,” says Stefan Austermühle, president of Mundo Azul. “The real problem here is that tens of thousands of sharks are killed in Peru every year and

most of these animals are juveniles, which is in violation of legislation already in place. Again, the government needs to commit resources to implement and control their existing regulations”, Austermühle adds.

Earlier in the year, initial proceedings began in the trial of three Peruvian shark fishermen accused of killing dolphins. It is the first case of prosecution of fishermen and application of the law since 1996 that strictly prohibits any intentional injuring, hunting and consumption of dolphins. “Recently, we reported on the trial of dolphin killers. Now, we can celebrate the ban of harpoons and the landing of shark fins. These latest developments are hopeful signs, that the Peruvian state commits itself more strongly to the conservation of its marine biodiversity,” says Hardy Jones, executive director of BlueVoice. “We are in the final stage of editing the footage from the undercover investigation into the dolphin and shark slaughters for a documentary film for international television broadcast. Now, we have a promising ending for the film,” Jones concludes.

A coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) including OceanCare (Switzerland), BlueVoice (USA) and Mundo Azul (Peru) are collaborating to end the brutal slaughter of dolphins and sharks in Peru.

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Further links and information

- Video sale of baby shark in Peru market: <https://vimeo.com/171558056>
- Information about dolphin hunt Peru: <https://www.oceancare.org/en/our-work/animal-species-conservation/dolphins/dolphin-hunt-peru/>
- Link to Supreme Decree No. 021-2016-PRODUCE published in the official newspaper *El Peruano* on November 2, 2016 (pages 1-3): <http://busquedas.elperuano.com.pe/download/url/decreto-supremo-que-establece-medidas-de-ordenamiento-para-el-decreto-supremo-n-021-2016-produce-1448564-3>.

Translation (own) of respective excerpts:

That, according to el Oficio N° DEC-100-248-2013- PRODUCE/IMP the Peruvian Ocean Institute – IMARPE returns the technical report “Revisión of the Peruvian legislation related to the protection of small cetaceans”, in which it informs that in the fishing of sharks with longlines, it is reported the direct capture of dolphins by means of harpoons thrown by hand for its use as bait [...].

Article 2 – prohibition of possession and use of “animal harpoon”.

Prohibited on board fishing vessels, the possession and use of the apparatus for fishing called “animal harpoon”, no matter what material it may be made from. The use of any other harpoon must be used exclusively with the intent of extraction by means of a diving system. (Spearfishing). Understood as an “animal harpoon” a point of bronze or iron with construction of a sharpened point, spliced to a rod and attached to the fishing vessel by means of a rope or line; As well as any variant thereof, which is used on board a fishing vessel. [...]



Pictures

- Harpoon tip, also called “feather” used in the dolphin hunt. Available in high resolution upon demand. © Robert Marc Lehmann. www.nosebrokeproductions.com

About OceanCare

OceanCare is a Swiss non-profit organisation. It was founded in 1989 and has a strong commitment to realistic and cooperative initiatives. The organisation works at national and international level in the areas of marine pollution, environmental changes, fisheries, whaling, sealing, captivity of marine mammals and public education. OceanCare has the Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and is partner of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and UNEP/CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS). OceanCare is also an observer to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and a part of the UNEP Global Partnership on Marine Litter. www.oceancare.org

About BlueVoice

BlueVoice.org is an ocean conservation organisation founded in 2000 by Hardy Jones and Ted Danson. Its mission is to protect dolphins, whales, and other marine mammals and to raise popular awareness about the plight of the oceans. BlueVoice has fought to end the slaughter of dolphins in Japan and to expose the harmful levels of toxins in the marine environment, including mercury, PCBs, and persistent organic pollutants, and their impact on both marine mammals and humans. www.bluevoice.org

About Mundo Azul

Mundo Azul was founded in 1999 and aims at protecting and preserving marine biodiversity and marine habitats. Mundo Azul has good connections around the globe and developed into the most important coastal and marine conservation organisation in Peru. The organisation's work has been recognized several times. Mundo Azul received the “Cambie” Award of the University of the South Pacific for their achievements in protecting endangered dolphins in 2003, and the “Cambie” Award for marine habitat conservation work in 2004. Further, a coalition of 24 international NGOs decorated Stefan Austermuehle with the “Dolphin Defender” Award 2014 for his heroic activities in dolphin protection. www.mundoazul.org