ICRI Recommendation on
Improving Shark Conservation for Coral Reef Resiliency

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Sharks play a fundamental role as apex predators on coral reefs in maintaining the ecological balance that promotes ecosystem health and resiliency. The removal of sharks from coral reefs can have cascading effects on the structure and function of food webs, causing shifts in reef fish communities and negatively impacting the reef ecosystem. Scientific surveys have confirmed that shark populations, including coastal reef sharks, are being depleted at alarming rates, and the impact of their removal is being felt even in the most pristine and remote coral reef ecosystems.

Evidence presented during the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium held in Florida in July 2008 indicates shark populations across the globe are declining at alarming rates from the combined effects of IUU fishing, over-exploitation, incidental bycatch, and the increased demand for shark products. The lack of basic data on many reef and coastal shark populations is hindering efforts to improve shark conservation.

Recalling that the 2007-2009 ICRI Secretariat Action Plan seeks to ensure the long-term survival and productivity of coral reefs by discouraging unsustainable fisheries, extraction or trade;

The General Meeting of the International Coral Reef Initiative strongly encourages its members and networks, other governments, donor agencies, non-governmental organizations, the scientific community, and other relevant organizations to take the following actions to improve shark conservation:

i) Promote the implementation of the 2007 United Nations General Assembly Sustainable Fisheries Resolution, which calls upon States and international organizations to take the necessary measures to protect, conserve and manage threatened and vulnerable shark populations;

ii) Promote the implementation of the 1999 FAO International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks), including facilitating the development of Regional and National Plans of Action by coastal and small island States, the adoption of binding shark conservation and management measures by regional fisheries management organizations, and the monitoring of trade in sharks and shark products at appropriate multilateral or international fora as well as among states and fisheries management organizations concerned;

iii) Raise awareness of the importance of sharks in promoting healthy, resilient coral reef ecosystems;

iv) Improve data collection, monitoring and ecosystem-based shark management measures by regional fisheries management organizations and national fishery management authorities; and

v) Support increased research and capacity-building to improve our understanding of the role sharks play in coral reef ecosystems, invest in research on shark bycatch reduction

methods and technologies, and promote best practices to decrease incidental shark mortalities in line fisheries or reduce damage to coral reefs.