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### **National Sharks and Rays Workshop 2013**

The National Sharks and Rays Workshop was held on Tuesday, 28th January 2013, in the city of Manta, Ecuador, organized by the Vice Ministry of Aquaculture and Fishing (VMAP) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fishing (MAGAP), co-sponsored by WWF and Conservation International. Officials attended this national workshop from diverse government agencies involved in marine biodiversity conservation and management, including the VMAP, the Ministry of the Environment (MAE) and the Technical Secretariat of the Sea; NGOs dedicated to marine investigation and conservation in Ecuador; and representatives of the fishing sector.

The main purpose of the workshop was to analyze and revise the matrix of components and actions of the National Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks in Ecuador (PAT-Ec) for the duration of its next planning period: 2013-2017. Ecuador adopted a PAT-Ec in 2006, which has been in full swing ever since. This plan, initially created through a participative process over several years following the guidance of the FAO International Shark Action Plans, was recently the subject of an external evaluation. The evaluation reached its conclusion in 2012, generating a series of recommendations.

Highlights among the main activities and achievements of the first iteration of the PAT-Ec, are: the development of information collection systems for applied research, through dockside monitoring and an on-board observer program; the establishment of a traceability system based on monitoring certificates and movement permits; the prohibition of fining (the practice of separating shark fins and discarding the rest of the body to at sea) and targeted fishing of sharks and rays; the protection of several emblematic species; the elimination of the use of steel cable in longline gears; and the production of communication materials and workshops directed at fishers, to enable them to better identify shark species; and the evaluation of the action plan by a third party.

Following a presentation of the results of the external evaluation of the PAT-Ec, the participants of this multisector workshop analyzed and contributed to the draft



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matrix of components and actions for the PAT-Ec 2013-2017. Among the main activities envisaged for the coming years are stock evaluations for principal shark species, the identification and investigation of the most important habitats for sharks and rays, the integration of the diving and sport fishing sectors in shark and ray conservation, and the adoption of management and conservation measures for certain species of commercial interest. In the knowledge that unilateral measures are of little use for these highly migratory species, Ecuador has taken upon itself the additional goal of leading efforts towards regional management agreements.

In the afternoon, four case studies of applied research into sharks and rays in Ecuador, produced within the framework of the PAT-Ec, were presented. The investigations of two species of hammerhead shark and silky shark, carried out by the VMAP, exploited biological and fishing information collected since 2003 of over 24,000 individuals. The study of migratory movements, population size and habitat use of the giant manta ray (*Manta birostris*), suggests one of the largest populations in the world of this species resides in Ecuador. As a result, Ecuador will join forces with Colombia and Brazil to propose the inclusion of this species in CITES Appendix II at the upcoming conference, taking place next March in Bangkok. Finally, a new educational series on Sharks and Rays was launched, including informative posters and themed packs of cards, so that fishers and other actors can familiarize themselves with the main species of sharks and rays, their biology and conservation status. The authorities envisage that Ecuador will finalize its new Action Plan by July 2013, allowing them to coordinate management and conservation activities for sharks for the next 5 years.

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