ICCAT Shark Finning Rules – Atlantic Tuna Commission Ends an 18-Year Deadlock

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Why in News?

At its 2026 annual meeting in Vilamoura, Portugal, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) agreed new rules to enforce its shark finning ban, ending an 18-year deadlock.

About ICCAT

- **Nature** – An intergovernmental regional fisheries management organisation (RFMO) set up by the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (Rio de Janeiro, 1966; in force 1969).
- **Status** – Autonomous: FAO convened the conference that framed the Convention, but the Commission works independently of FAO and the UN system.
- **Base and members** – Headquartered in Madrid, Spain; 56 contracting parties, including the European Union.
- **Mandate** – Conserve tuna, tuna-like species and sharks caught with them in the Atlantic at levels giving maximum sustainable yield, through data collection, stock assessments and recommendations binding on members.



The New Shark Finning Rules

- **Finning** – Cutting off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea, driven by demand for shark fin soup.

- **Rule** – Sharks must be landed with fins naturally attached, and loose fins cannot be carried on board.
- **Timeline** – This becomes the default within about three years; alternatives may continue beyond 2029 if at least three countries officially and consistently use them.
- **Compromise** – Led by Japan, which had earlier blocked consensus; conservationists fear the alternatives weaken enforcement.
- **Also** – The ban on retaining shortfin mako sharks continues.

Significance for India

- **Not a member** – India is not an ICCAT party, so the rules do not bind its vessels; its tuna fisheries fall under the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), where it is a member.
- **Precedent** – IOTC adopted a fins-attached landing rule in 2025, so ICCAT's move strengthens the global standard.
- **Conservation** – Backs India's shark protection under the Wildlife (Protection) Act and CITES.

Reference

Down To Earth | Atlantic tuna commission agrees on shark finning rules, maintains shortfin mako retention ban

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