



PRESS RELEASE

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Maldives Imposes Shark Hunting Ban

The Maldives imposed today a total ban on reef shark hunting.

The government said the ban will help restore shark numbers, which have fallen in recent years due to hunting.

The Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture, Dr. Ibrahim Didi, said the ban would make the Maldives a 'shark safe haven.'

"The protection measures announced today should lead to a recovery in shark numbers, providing a boon for both the environment and the tourism industry," the Minister said.

The Maldives' pristine coral reefs are home to large populations of reef sharks, Manta Rays, Whale Sharks, turtles and exotic fish, making the country one of the world's top diving destinations.

"Today, we announced a complete ban on all shark hunting within the Maldives' atolls and lagoons and in the waters up to 12 miles off the Maldivian atoll coast. This will protect all types of reef sharks in the Maldives," the Minister said.

"Within 365 days, we will extend the ban to all of the country's territorial waters. This will also protect oceanic sharks and will pave the way to a complete ban on the export of all shark products," he added.

The Ministry of Fisheries says it is working with all stakeholders to find alternative livelihoods for fishermen who derive their income from shark hunting.

In a news conference held in Male', Dr. Hussain Rasheed Hassan, State Minister for the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture, said that the ministry will formulate a program for the existing shark fisherman to change into alternative income generating areas.

The Maldives' newly-elected president, Mohamed Nasheed, said he was "delighted" with the ban.

"The ban will restore the Maldives' shark populations and, in doing so, help maintain our pristine marine environment," the President said.

"The shark hunting ban will also help the tourism industry. More divers and snorkelers will now visit the Maldives to observe these beautiful sea creatures.

"In the 1990s, our turtle population declined. But greater public awareness about the need to protect turtles led to numbers recovering. I hope our sharks will witness a similar recovery," President Nasheed added.

The Maldives attracts 600,000 tourists per year. Tourism accounts for 28% of the country's GDP.

Fishing is the Maldives' second biggest industry after tourism. Only 180 of the country's 15,000 fishermen are believed to hunt sharks.

There is no domestic market for shark products in the Maldives. Sharks caught in the Maldives are exported abroad, predominantly to East Asia.

In 2007, shark products accounted for just 0.2% of the country's total marine exports.

Maldivian reef sharks are considered harmless to humans.

For more information about the shark hunting ban, please contact Dr. Abdulla Naseer, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture, on 00960 7788197 or at Abdulla.naseer@fishagri.gov.mv

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