



## Fact Sheet

# Blue Shark

- ! Whereas most species of sharks caught in the world's fisheries confine themselves to coastal areas, blue sharks occur in a broad band across the Pacific Ocean. Their wide distribution in all oceans means that the population as a whole is less accessible to fisheries than sharks in coastal areas where habitat is limited and fishing pressure is more intense.
  
- ! The biology of most shark species tends to make them quite vulnerable to overfishing. Blue sharks are an exception to this rule because of their reproductive behavior as well as their wide distribution.
  - While many shark species do not breed until they are 10 or more years old, female blue sharks mature at five to six years and males at four to five years.
  
  - While most species of sharks have less than 10 pups per litter, blue shark offspring can number up to 135 pups in a litter. Their average litter size is about 25 to 30.
  
  - Because of their early maturity and large litter size, blue shark populations can grow rapidly, and, if the abundance is ever depressed in an area, it can be replenished both by immigration from surrounding areas and by growth to maturity of large numbers of young sharks.
  
- ! The wide distribution of blue shark means that any potential overseas markets for blue shark meat can be supplied by local fisheries.
  
- ! Because blue sharks have a high urea content in their blood to aid buoyancy, they require more at-sea processing than most other fish, to avoid tainting the meat.
  
- ! Of the approximately 100,000 sharks caught per year by the Hawaii pelagic longline fishery, 90 to 95 percent are blue shark. Blue shark in the Hawaii market is worth only a few cents per pound, a small fraction of the value of swordfish or tuna.
  
- ! A comprehensive stock assessment of blue shark by the National Marine Fisheries Service's Honolulu Laboratory, in collaboration with the Japanese government scientists, is expected to be completed by December 1999. Meanwhile, the consistency of blue shark catch rates over the past decade in the Hawaii longline fishery indicates that the species is not overfished.

