



O R A N G E C O U N T Y
COASTKEEPER®

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May 19, 2011

The Honorable Curt Hagman
California State Assembly
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 376(Fong, Huffman) - **SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Hagman,

Our organization is gravely concerned about the rapid decline of the ocean's shark populations and support AB 376(Fong, Huffman), legislation that seeks to end California's contribution to the shark fin trade.

Sharks occupy the top of the ocean ecosystem and play a critical role in maintaining overall ocean health. There are naturally relatively few sharks in the ocean; sharks can take as much as a decade to reach reproductive maturity and birth small litters. Many sharks travel long distances between California and other countries in search of new food sources.

Their unique biology makes sharks particularly susceptible to overfishing and means that a sustainable shark fishery is impossible. Farming sharks is also infeasible because sharks cannot survive in captivity. Despite these hard facts, the demand for shark fin continues to grow and contributes significantly to recent shark population declines, with some species depleted by as much as 90%. Scientists have documented adverse impacts on the ocean ecosystem and other fisheries as a result of this relatively rapid and dramatic shift.

The growing shark fin trade is driving increased shark fishing and putting these already vulnerable animals at risk of extinction. Unfortunately current California and federal laws that ban the cruel practice of shark "finning," even if made more robust, are insufficient to stem these catastrophic shark declines. No matter how a shark is fished, whether from cruel methods or not, there are simply not enough sharks to meet the demand for shark fin.

Likewise, a ban on the importation of listed endangered species cannot save sharks; first because it is impossible to accurately identify whether a shark fin was removed from a listed endangered shark species without costly and time-consuming DNA analysis conducted for each fin, and second because the demand trend for shark fin suggests that most shark species are at risk of extinction on the current demand trajectory, even if they are not currently listed as endangered.

California is a significant market for shark fin and contributes to the problem facing our ocean ecosystem. Although marine biologists, ocean health organizations, and shark experts agree that the shark fin trade has put sharks in serious trouble, some industry advocates claim that sharks can be fished sustainably. For the reasons outlined above we wholeheartedly disagree with this claim and support a ban on the California shark fin trade.

We know that trade bans work to protect vulnerable species and protect related ecosystems. In recent history the ivory trade, the bear paw trade, and several other highly sought products like shark fin were banned to ensure that our environment is sustained now and for future generations.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Garry Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "G" and "B".

Garry Brown
Executive Director
Orange County Coastkeeper