



TO: Senator Bill Montford
Chairman, Environmental and Natural Resources Committee
Tallahassee, Florida

RE: **In Support of SB 680 (Shark Fin Trade)**

DATE: January 20, 2019

Thank you for considering legislation that will stop the sale and trade of shark fins in our State. I am writing to you both as Director of Conservation and Outreach at the Sea of Change Foundation and as a Florida resident and descendent of four generations of Florida agricultural land-landowners. I earned my Masters of Marine Affairs and Policy at the University of Miami's Rosensteel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science and served as Adjunct Faculty teaching Environmental Ethics and Florida Ecosystems at Miami-Dade College.

Florida is a special place, like South Africa and Australia, that has long been synonymous with lots of sharks. However, the reality today is different. For example, scientists estimate that between 1981 and 2005 hammerhead shark populations suffered more than 90% decline in the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. Additionally, the history of Florida's sharks is a sad example of over-exploitation resulting in a shifting baseline. In the 1920's and 30's there were at least two significant shark processing factories in Florida. By 1946, at the height of its production, the factory in Martin County processed 25,000+ 'tigers of the sea' per year. The factory in the Florida Keys reported processing 100 sharks per day, on average. These factories eventually closed when cheaper sources of vitamin A came on the market, but the sharks were likely already fished out of the area. Still today, in these same waters, it can take days for researchers to find a single large shark.

The historical lesson is that when markets for unsustainable wild animal products – especially those from animals with low reproductive rates i.e. many shark species – go unchecked, those markets may flourish but often to the long-term detriment of the exploited species and their ecosystem. The fact is that Florida and the world's oceans were once far richer in sharks than they are now. Scientists estimate that up to 273 million sharks are killed per year throughout the world's oceans with the primary incentive being the high market value of their fins in the international trade.

Florida has recently supported shark conservation. In 2010 and 2011, as Programs Manager for the Florida-based non-profit Shark Savers, I was honored to work with a united coalition of local conservation organizations, scientists, catch-and-release fishermen and concerned citizens to encourage the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to add lemon sharks, three species of hammerhead sharks, and tiger sharks to the State's Protected Species list. Today, the state of Florida legally protects these species as part of a total of approximately 25 protected sharks and rays. FWC defines this protected status as prohibiting the harvest, possession, landing, purchase or sale of these species or any part of them. (continued pg. 2)



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Florida can be proud of its efforts in protecting sharks and that our State was the first place to specifically protect the much-maligned but ecologically vital tiger shark. These are important measures in shark conservation given their key roles as apex predators.

However, there remains a significant gap in Florida's shark protections by allowing the shark fin trade. Currently, the shark fin trade is illegal in 12 U.S. states and three territories while it remains legal in Florida with Miami being the largest import/export hub for fins in the country. Unfortunately, a legal market for shark fins creates a pathway for illegal fins. Because sources and species are nearly impossible to trace, fins from threatened and endangered species are in the mix; and, DNA testing of trafficked fins is far beyond the operational scope of most ports and trade enforcement agencies. Much like high-value elephant ivory, rhino horn, and other unsustainable endangered species products that are driving charismatic fauna to the brink of extinction, the best way to protect sharks is by not allowing the possession, sale, or trade in their fins in the State of Florida.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S Whitcraft". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Samantha Whitcraft
Director, Conservation & Outreach
Sea of Change Foundation