

**Animal Law Coalition\*Animal Welfare Institute\*Aquarium of the Bay\*Association of Zoos and Aquariums\*Conservation International\*Conservation Law Foundation\*Defenders of Wildlife\*Earthjustice\*Endangered Species Coalition\*Friends of the Earth\*Humane Society of the United States\*Iemanya Oceanica\*Marine Conservation Biology Institute\*Marine Conservation Science Institute\*Monterey Bay Aquarium\*National Aquarium\*National Coalition for Marine Conservation\*Natural Resources Defense Council\*Ocean Champions\*Ocean Conservancy\*Oceana\*Pacific Environment\*The Pelagic Shark Research Foundation\*Pew Environment Group\*Santa Monica Pier Aquarium\*Shark Research Institute\*Shark Savers\*Shedd Aquarium\*World Wildlife Fund**

November 17, 2009

Dear Senator:

Almost 10 years ago, Congress passed the Shark Finning Prohibition Act to outlaw shark finning in U.S. waters. Although it was a good first step for stronger shark conservation, the law fell short of stopping the practice of finning, or, cutting off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea. Legislation currently before the Senate would pick up where the Shark Finning Prohibition Act left off. S. 850, the Shark Conservation Act, would greatly improve existing law and help strengthen conservation measures for sharks in the U.S. and worldwide. We, the undersigned organizations and businesses, on behalf of our members nationwide, strongly urge you to support the Shark Conservation Act of 2009 in its current form. **We urge you to oppose any weakening amendments, and move swiftly to pass S. 850 this year.**

The Shark Conservation Act, introduced by Senator Kerry and supported by a bipartisan group of 19 Senators from around the country, has passed the House of Representatives twice. Now is the time to ensure the passage of this crucial piece of legislation in the Senate. The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation will be considering this bill on Thursday, November 19<sup>th</sup>.

Up to 73 million sharks are killed each year to support the global fin trade. At this highly unsustainable rate, shark populations are suffering globally. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations estimates that more than half of highly migratory sharks are either overexploited or depleted. In U.S. waters, some shark species have declined by as much as 80% since the 1970s, and scientists are concerned that in some areas species of large sharks may already be functionally extinct – unable to perform their predatory role in the ecosystem. Sharks are arguably the most important predators in the ocean, balancing the marine food web and promoting ecosystem diversity which keeps our ocean ecosystems intact and healthy.

In order to begin reversing dangerous population trends, S. 850 takes steps for stronger shark conservation measures in the U.S. and encourages other countries to do the same. In order for the legislation to be effective, it is critical that the legislation applies to *all* federally managed shark species. In the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) already requires that federally managed sharks are landed with fins naturally-attached to their bodies. This management practice is commercially viable. S. 850 would extend this standard to the Pacific coast. In addition, the bill closes loopholes in the current law by making illegal the trade of shark fins at sea, and would allow the U.S. to identify and enter into consultations with countries that lack comparable shark fishery management measures.

We strongly support S. 850 to further conservation efforts for sharks. We urge the Senate Commerce Committee to swiftly pass the Shark Conservation Act and urge you to support the bill on the floor and oppose weakening amendments.

Sincerely,

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