

April 17, 2018

Dear Member of Congress:

As professional marine scientists, many with expertise in the biology and fisheries of sharks and their relatives the skates and rays, we write in support of H.R. 5248, the Sustainable Shark Fisheries and Trade Act of 2018. This legislation promotes responsible, science-based shark, skate, and ray fishery management around the world without economically harming U.S. law-abiding fishermen. It will help ensure that any products from these animals that enter U.S. markets are sourced only from countries where shark and ray fisheries are subject to comparable management measures as for U.S. shark, skate, and ray fisheries.

The more than 1,250 species of sharks and their relatives play important ecological roles in the many marine and freshwater habitats where they occur. Some species are also culturally and economically important. Yet 24% of chondrichthyan species are estimated to be threatened with extinction, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), making them one of the most threatened groups of animals on the planet. Overfishing – to feed the global demand for meat, fins, oil, gills, and other products – is the primary driver of these declines. Globally, many tens of millions of sharks and rays are caught and killed each year in directed fisheries or as incidental catch.

The U.S. has become a global leader in shark fishery management and conservation. Over the past 25 years, many of us have worked with the National Marine Fisheries Service, the fishing industry, conservation groups, and the public to raise awareness about the impact global fishing is having on these vulnerable species, and have pushed for science-based management. In accordance with strong regulatory standards under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the U.S. commercial fishing industry, to their credit, has adopted critical management measures for many shark and ray fisheries. This includes a domestic ban on the practice of shark finning (removing the fin and dumping the carcass), the implementation of catch quotas and other fishery regulations since the 1990s, and leadership in promoting similar measures in international fisheries fora. Recreational fisheries are also subject to management, and catch-and-release of sharks is becoming more common among anglers. As a result of this and effective rebuilding plans, the U.S. has some of the most sustainable shark fisheries in the world.

We are now seeing the benefits of these efforts, as some depleted shark populations in U.S. waters begin to rebuild. This provides evidence that fisheries, at least for some species, can be sustainable *if* carefully managed. The Sustainable Shark Fisheries and Trade Act of 2018 will require that any import of shark, skate, and ray products into U.S. markets be sourced from a country that has been certified to have shark, skate, and ray management and conservation measures comparable to those in the U.S., including science-based measures to prevent overfishing and comparable prohibitions on shark finning. In addition to promoting sustainable

fishery management by other fishing countries, this bill would also help level the playing field in international markets for U.S. fishermen, who have already taken the necessary steps to support responsible domestic shark, skate, and ray fisheries.

Although it is not the largest importer of shark products, the U.S. is a major shark and skate fishing and exporting country and therefore can lead in both modeling and promoting sustainable shark fisheries management and responsible trade for these species. Continuing to exercise this leadership can help to reverse the declining trend in many shark, skate, and ray populations around the world. We heartily endorse the Sustainable Shark Fisheries and Trade Act of 2018 and strongly urge its prompt passage by Congress.

Sincerely,

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