Surfers Call on Congress to Pass the Shark Fin Trade Elimination Act

As surfers, we are committed to ensuring the oceans we swim in maintain a balanced ecosystem as well as their natural beauty. This includes supporting practices that help protect marine habitats as well as banning those that contribute to the endangerment of the ocean’s inhabitants.

One practice stands above others in terms of wastefulness and cruelty — shark finning, which is fueled by the demand for shark fins. This process involves cutting the fins off of a shark and discarding its body at sea, where it dies a slow death from drowning, bleeding out or even being eaten alive by other fish.

Sharks have important ecological value, playing critical roles in structuring ocean food webs. This means that declines in shark populations can create a domino effect of unintended consequences, including the possibility of damaging other marine animal populations.

The demand for shark fins is primarily driven by the market for shark fin soup, which is considered a luxury item in some Asian cuisines. In fact, it is estimated that fins from as many as 73 million sharks end up in the global shark fin trade every year.

This is especially troubling because many shark populations are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. These species tend to have long lifespans, mature slowly and produce relatively few young, making them slow to recover from unsustainable fishing. Some shark populations around the world have declined by more than 90 percent, with between 63 and 273 million sharks killed every year.

While shark finning is banned in U.S. waters, it is still legal to buy, sell and trade shark fins throughout most of the country. By allowing the trade of shark fins within our borders, the U.S. continues to contribute to this global problem.

Eleven states and three U.S. territories have already banned the sale or trade of most shark fins. The Chinese government has stopped serving shark fin soup at official government banquets. Private companies are also refusing to ship or sell shark fin products, including Amazon, GrubHub, many hotels and major airlines, Disney and multiple shipping companies.
Even surfers who have faced risky encounters with sharks while enjoying their craft support protecting these important apex predators. Hawaiian surfer Mike Coots suffered injuries from a tiger shark encounter when he was 18-years-old, but soon after became a shark conservation advocate. He promoted legislation banning the possession of shark fins in Hawaii, and in 2010, the state became the first to pass such a law.

The fact is that we should be scared for sharks, not of them.

A national ban on shark fins would reinforce the status of the United States as a leader in shark conservation, setting an example for the rest of the world.

A poll released last year by conservation group Oceana revealed that eight in 10 Americans (81 percent) support a ban on the trade of shark fins in the United States. We agree — there’s no place for shark fins in the United States. It’s time to make it official.

Sincerely,

Signers as of October 9, 2017:

Lauren Adamo
New Jersey

Christopher Barclay

Mathias Bedolfe
Dana Point, CA

Dr. Tal Ben-Horin
Research Fellow
University of Rhode Island

Jocelyn Bezner

Marcell Boaventure

Brady Bradshaw
Oceana
Encinitas, CA

Jesse Bull, Ph.D

Todd T. Cardiff, Esq.
San Diego, CA

Joanne Ciletti

Dennis Ciletti

Mike Coots
Shark attack survivor
Advocate for the protection of sharks
Kilauea, HI

Sean Davey
Water photographer
Haleiwa, HI
Mikey DeTemple  
Brooklyn, NY

Mariko Fujio-White  
Venice, CA

Maya Gabeira  
Professional big wave surfer

Ryan Patrick Gallagher  
URN Surf Company  
Chalfont, PA

Sunny Garcia  
World champion surfer  
Waianae, HI

Julie Geissmann  
Jacksonville Beach, FL

Mike Gibaldi  
Executive Committee  
Miami chapter  
Surfrider Foundation  
Miami, FL

Alex Gray  
Washington, DC

Laird Hamilton  
Malibu, CA

Becca Hammersla  
Miami, FL

Christine L. Harvey  
PhD Candidate  
Tarpon & Bonefish Research Center  
Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science  
University of Miami

Nancy Hastings  
Field Organizer  
Oceana  
Laguna Niguel, CA

Jaz P. Kaner  
Banzai Surf Co  
Long Beach, CA

Zack Karvelas  
Field Intern  
Oceana  
Arlington, VA

Rick Karvelas  
Long Branch, NJ

Parker Kellam  
Miami, FL

Nick LaVecchia  
Ocean/surf photographer  
Maine

Riley Linder  
Rotterdam, Netherlands

John Lodise  
PhD student in Physical Oceanography  
Miami, FL

Morgan Maassen  
Los Angeles, CA

Tyler Mack  
Florida

Mary McNeill
Vanessa Meier  
Santa Monica, CA

Wessley Merten  
Ph.D, Marine Science  
Washington, DC

Karen Monteagudo

Shannon Muir Gerritzen  
Gig Harbor, WA

Patrick Murphy  
Venice, CA

Juan Oliphant  
Co-owner and co-founder  
One Ocean Diving and Research  
Lead photographer  
Water Inspired Conservation Group

Mary Carmel Osborne  
Pro surfer  
Business owner

Zachary Paz  
San Diego, CA

Caiti V. Pomerance  
Miami, FL

Amber Puha  
Professor  
California State University San Marcos

Ocean Ramsey  
Marine biologist/ethologist  
Co-owner and co-founder  
Head field researcher  
One Ocean Diving and Research

Brianna Rivas

Shannon Roback, PhD.  
Scientist  
Los Angeles, CA

Tim Sanford  
Owner  
Stand up paddle board school  
Los Angeles, CA

Tyler Sankey  
7th Street Surf Shop  
Ocean City, NJ

Jacqueline Savitz  
Senior Vice President  
United States  
Oceana  
Washington, DC

Juli Schulz  
Venice, CA

Tina Segura  
Volunteer  
Los Angeles chapter  
Surfrider Foundation  
Santa Monica, CA

Rachel Shelley, PhD.  
Research Associate  
Florida State University  
Tallahassee, FL

Jamie Shoemaker, LVN

Bonnie Slade

Kyle Stanley  
Ocean City, NJ
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<td>Professional big wave surfer</td>
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<td>Maggie Stewart</td>
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<td>Katherine Terrell</td>
<td>Founder Jeux De Vagues Malibu, CA</td>
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<td>Kyle Thiermann</td>
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<td>Alison Walker</td>
<td>Program Professional Earth Ethics Institute Director Environmental Education Providers of Miami Dade Miami, FL</td>
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<td>Justin Weatherspoon</td>
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<td>Zack Weisburg</td>
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