

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

April 7, 2000 To : Honorable Jim Saxton, Chairman
Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation,
Wildlife and Oceans
Re: HR 3535

From: William J. Aila Jr, Hawaiian Fisherman

Aloha! Mr. Chairman and Honorable Representatives of the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans; including my own Honorable Representative from Hawaii, Neil Abercrombie. A special Aloha! to our Island cousins, Representatives Eni Faleomavaega of American Samoa, and Carlos Romero-Barcelo of Puerto Rico.

My name is William J. Aila Jr., I am a Native Hawaiian Fisherman from the District of Wai'anae, on the Island of Oahu, which lies 30 miles west of Honolulu. I have served on WESPAC's Pelagic Advisory Panel for over 11 years and co-chaired the panel for two terms. I would like to thank Chairman Saxton and members of the Subcommittee for the invitation to offer testimony on this very important bill. My ancestors are honored, my family is honored, and I am humbly honored. I would also like to thank Representative Cunningham of California and his colleagues, for having the courage and vision to introduce this bill,

I am pleased to announce that on Wednesday April 5, 2000 the Hawaii State Senate Committee on Water, Land, and Hawaiian Affairs, unanimously passed HB 1947. This bill will ban the landing of shark fins in Hawaii unless the shark is landed whole. I am proud to say that the Chairperson of the Senate Water, Land, and Hawaiian Affairs committee, Colleen Hanabusa, represents my very own district, Wai'anae.

I humbly request the Committee's forgiveness for any breaches of Washington protocol that I may be unaware of, as this is my first time testifying in Washington. I will restrict my comments to Shark Finning concerns within the Western Pacific Region

and under the auspicious of the re-authorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act, sets out three primary criteria for Regional Management Councils to base its Fisheries Management Plans(FMP's) on. The Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council(WESPAC) at its February 2000 meeting in Honolulu, has chosen in, my opinion, to ignore at least one criteria and belittle the other two.

In its proposed Shark FMP, WESPAC would authorize the finning of 50,000 blue sharks per year, wasting over 95% of the resource. How WESPAC could have justified this proposal on any criteria, other than greed mystifies me. FMP's are supposed to be based on the following criteria:

BIOLOGICAL

WESPAC relied on NMFS analysis of Japanese log book data however, the Japanese fleet represents only about 30% of the total effort in the Pacific. They failed to obtain or consider the data from the South Koreans, Taiwanese, Chinese, and Russian fleets. Basing scientific models on a foundation of only 30% of the total information is a recipe for failure!

ECONOMIC

Estimated income from shark finning to Hawaii based Longline Fishermen range from "beer money" as described to me a few years ago by James Cook, current Chairman of WESPAC, to \$2,500 per crew member per year, or about 11% of the "estimated" annual wage. "Estimated" should be emphasized here because no one knows for sure how much revenue is generated from shark fin sales. Sales are conducted in cash and generally treated as unreported income. As such, tax revenue is not realized by either the State or Federal governments. Allowing the finning of sharks and the outright waste of shark resources for what amounts to little more than beer money, is terrible and an unacceptable waste and violates the spirit of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which requires a reduction of waste.

SOCIAL

Social aspects include cultural practices and beliefs both past and present. In the case of Hawaiians, WESPAC at the direction of its Chairman Cook, completely ignored Hawaiian cultural practices and values, and chose not to wait until a requested cultural study was completed. WESPAC proceeded with its Shark FMP despite plea's from Native Hawaiian Fishermen, to consider the social impacts. Hawaiians consider the taking of sharks for only their fins as wasteful and offensive. We encourage full utilization or no utilization.

Individual sharks of the many species known to Hawaiians, including blue sharks, served and continue to serve as family guardians. My grandfathers and great-grand fathers cared for certain sharks, our family Aumakua. Kamohoali'i is the name of the shark that I malama, or care for. The relationship is that of grandchild to grandparent. The relationship doesn't end when the grandparent dies. The values, lessons, and respect never diminish. The need for advice continues. How many times in your life have you thought back to the words of your grandfather or grandmother, for guidance in troublesome times or while contemplating important decisions? The answer is we all have. How would you feel if someone were to sever that connection between you and your grandparent? How would you feel if someone were allowed to kill one of your grandparents, just for "beer money"? The thought turns and twists my intestines or as we refer to it in Hawaii as my na'au. That is exactly how I feel about my Aumakua and thought of Shark finning offends me.

I urge the Committee, the full House, and the Senate to pass this bill and end this wasteful, offensive, and unnecessary practice. My culture, your culture, and the precautionary policies within the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, demands it.

Mahalo for the opportunity and honor to testify before this esteemed committee.

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