

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Witness Statement

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Congressman Jim Saxton, Chairman

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Testimony in Support of House Concurrent Resolution 189

Submitted by

Brooke Burns

Good Morning.....Thank you Mr Chairman and members of the Committee for inviting me to testify before you today. My name is Brooke Burns and I am currently employed by the television show Baywatch Hawaii. The show is now filmed in and around the Hawaiian islands taking advantage of its thriving marine environment.

I am originally from Texas, however I have had the opportunity to travel to a number of places that have beautiful, pristine waters and thriving fish life, as I thoroughly enjoy scuba diving, swimming and generally all activities associated with the ocean.

I am here today to speak in strong support of House Concurrent resolution 189. The resolution is an extremely import first step, as shark finning continues unabated in the Pacific. I am not a marine biologist or involved in fisheries management, however, I feel it doesn't take a biology degree to realize that cutting off of a sharks fins and throwing the rest of the shark back into the water either alive or dead, is a clear and simple waste of a valuable resource.

Proponents of shark finning claim that the shark populations in the Pacific are healthy and therefore their's for the taking. However, I understand that the scientific studies are not complete and I'm confused as to what study can possibly be done that will change the definition of waste. Shark finning will always be a

waste, regardless if it is done to a shark fishery that is over-fished or under-fished. So all the studies in the world will not change a thing if finning is allowed to continue.

The Department of Commerce has set the national standard when they stopped the practice of shark finning in both the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico and said that all of the shark must be used if killed by fishermen. In their own words the National Marine Fisheries Service responded to public comment and justified the new regulations by stating that "Finning of sharks within the Federal management unit has been prohibited since the original shark FMP was implemented in 1993 **due to excessive waste associated with this practice.**" With that said, is shark finning any less of a waste if it's done in the Pacific?

Last weeks LA Times article, "Shark Finning for soup is nuts" really put things into perspective for me. Over 60,000 sharks are killed by fishermen in Hawaii needlessly every year and no one has taken any steps to stop shark finning. The fact that 85% of the sharks that are caught are alive, when they are brought to the boat and could be released alive is a sad commentary for us as a nation, just so someone can have a bowl of shark fin soup. If the shark populations are healthy and if it is deemed appropriate to catch and sell sharks, then all of that shark should be used. Shark finning is no different than killing an elephant for its ivory tusks, a rhino for its horn, or a buffalo for its hide. A waste is a waste and harmful to any species that is preyed upon for the almighty dollar.

I would think that with as much environmental damage that has occurred world wide a sophisticated society such as ours can distinguish between right and wrong and it's obvious to the vast majority of people worldwide that shark finning is clearly wrong.

In 1996, SeaWeb commissioned a nationwide opinion poll to gauge public attitudes toward the ocean. 1300 adults around the country were interviewed in this telephone poll, which was conducted by an independent professional polling company, The Mellman Group, located in Washington, DC.

Among the many questions asked were some which addressed attitudes towards sharks and shark finning. The poll revealed that Americans are nearly unanimous in believing the oceans are threatened by human activity, and they discovered that shark finning is one issue that angers the American people the most. The poll found that nearly three-quarters (72%) of the American public believe that killing sharks for their fins, is a serious problem, with 30% of them saying very serious. Like the SeaWeb poll, a recent CNN poll shows that 94% of the 3392 people who responded indicated that they opposed finning. The people of the United States, as well as those in Hawaii, who submitted testimony to stop finning to the Hawaii State Legislature, have spoken and shouldn't that be enough to make sure their concerns are heard, with regulations to stop shark finning immediately?

The United States has been a world leader in trying to stop the practice of shark finning by all countries. In a June 21, 1999 letter to the Chairman of the Western Pacific Council, Mr. Terry Garcia directs the Council to "take immediate action to ban the practice of shark finning". Mr. Garcia is the Deputy Administrator for NOAA which oversees the Council. In the letter, Mr. Garcia points out that the US has been a leading proponent of international shark conservation measures at the United Nations meetings this year. He goes on to say that "The US position during development of the International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks was that the United Nations should affirmatively address this issue, even to the extent of putting in place a global ban on shark finning". How can the United States convince other Countries to stop finning if we allow shark finning to continue in US fisheries.

I realize that being on T.V., much like yourselves being members of Congress, makes us all role models. Ethical behavior in our children starts with our actions today. If we expect the children of tomorrow or countries around the world to adopt ethical and sound management measures to protect our natural resources for the next generation, we as role models must lead by example. In this case our choice is simple, do we continue the practice of shark finning in the Pacific that we ourselves find wasteful in the Atlantic and expect other countries to listen to our pleas for a global ban? Or do we lead by example and stop this wasteful and potentially harmful practice in all waters under the control of the United States now before it is to late.

Thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to testify before you.

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