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January 11, 2006

Gregory Coogan, Chairman  
Oak Bluffs Board of Selectmen  
PO Box 1327  
Oak Bluffs, MA 02557

Dear Mr. Coogan,

An article concerning the Oak Bluffs Monster Shark Tournament that appeared last week in the Martha's Vineyard Gazette has come to my attention. I am writing to thank the Board of Selectmen for discussing the possible discontinuation of the Oak Bluffs Monster Shark Tournament. Many of our members in Massachusetts and across the U.S. have expressed to us their concern that this tournament is neither humane for individual sharks nor of any benefit to shark conservation. We have obtained information from federal fishery managers and published scientific literature that leads us to believe that this tournament is more about spectacle than it is about science.

The global shark population is in steep decline. Like other species, they are overfished and under-managed. It may be a fierce and magnificent predator, but the shark is no match for humans' high-tech fishing gear. Overfishing has reduced shark populations by as much as 90 percent in the last three decades. Despite that, relentless fishing pressure continues.

Sharks' worst nightmares are contests like the Oak Bluffs Monster Shark Tournament, held on the Martha's Vineyard. Entrants caught thousands of sharks and brought 46 to the docks as contest entries, including a 1,191-lb. tiger shark landed minutes too late to qualify for the contest but big enough to win worldwide publicity, and condemnation, for the tournament. The organized shark-killing melee received another publicity boost in the fall, when cable channel ESPN aired a documentary of the tournament. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) sent a letter on behalf of its 9 million constituents to ESPN asking it to cancel the show because of the cruel and sensationalistic nature of the event. We have heard from many people in the Cape Cod/Martha's Vineyard/Oak Bluffs region who worry about the visible unbridled cruelty of the contest and the negative publicity it brings to Martha's Vineyard. We share those concerns, particularly in reference to the message that such cruelty and inhumanity sends to a watching world.

Promoting the protection of all animals

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Gregory Coogan, Chairman  
January 11, 2006  
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The enclosed white paper, written by Marine Issues Field Director Sharon Young, offers some information about the conservation status of U.S. shark populations. I hope you will note that several species caught in the Monster Shark Tournament, including blue, thresher and Porbeagle sharks, are considered by the international scientific community to be endangered in large parts of their range.

We understand that you will be discussing this issue at a future meeting and will be entertaining comments on the pros and cons of continuing to host the Monster Shark Tournament. It would be a credit to your community and to your citizens if you cancel this tasteless and cruel event.

Due to the overwhelming concern of our members, I would like to respectfully request an opportunity for The Humane Society of the United States to address the Board.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. Please contact my assistant, Pat Gatons (301-258-3008) at your earliest convenience to arrange a meeting between your Board and a representative of The HSUS. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Wayne Pacelle  
President and CEO

CC: Board of Selectmen  
John Grandy, Senior Vice President  
Barbara Birdsey