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December 10, 2009

Mr. Earl Conley
Tournament Director
Mako Mania Shark Tournament, Bahia Marina
2107 Herring Way
Ocean City, MD 21842

Dear Mr. Conley:

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and its membership and constituency of more than 11 million Americans, I am writing regarding our concern for shark tournaments. The HSUS is the nation's largest and most active animal protection organization. Established in 1954, The HSUS has worked to end animal cruelty, exploitation, and neglect. The HSUS confronts national and global cruelties such as those inherent in commercial shark tournaments.

We are proud to acknowledge the strong support of fishpond USA, prominent outdoor and fishing equipment retailer, for our efforts to protect sharks and to spread awareness regarding the plight of sharks in commercial kill tournaments. We are also pleased that many shark tournaments have become wholly catch-and-release, while marinas are becoming shark-free (meaning caught sharks are not allowed on the docks).

Sharks are vital components of the marine environment, but their populations are being decimated worldwide. While commercial fishing has caused the global crash of the shark population, shark tournaments in the United States also contribute to the decline. Of the 547 species of sharks and rays evaluated by the World Conservation Union, one fifth is considered threatened with extinction, with the porbeagle shark as one of the most depleted, but also threshers, tigers, makos, and blue sharks—all targets of these commercial shark tournaments. In addition, there is still insufficient information available to evaluate the status of about 100 of these species, many of which are also caught in shark tournaments.

Many sharks are hooked, bled, suffocated, or gaffed; although some sharks are released during kill tournaments, they still undergo traumatizing experiences, therefore suffering a high mortality rate.

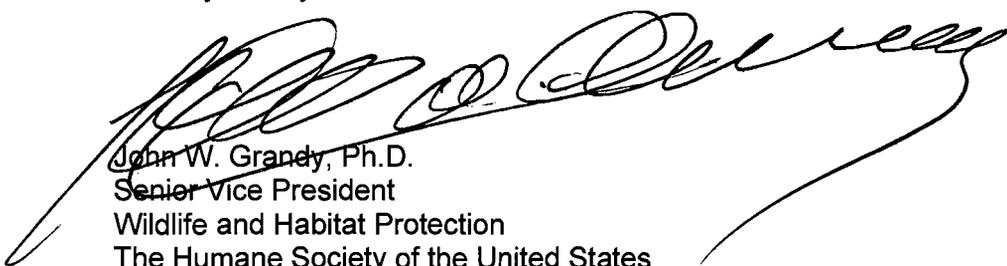
Although commercial tournament organizers often try to justify the killing sharks by saying that scientists can get information from the dead ones, shark tournaments are about needless killing and prizes, not science. To understand shark population abundance and population dynamics, scientists need a representative sampling that tournaments cannot supply. Sharks taken in commercial tournaments simply cannot provide the essential information needed to understand and protect shark populations.

Experts the world over are now united in the conclusion that sharks worldwide are threatened with virtual extirpation. Recently, Anderson Cooper's "Planet in Peril" gave considerable attention to the imperiled status of sharks, joining innumerable others (See i.e.: http://www.lenfestocean.org/ICCAT_sharks_catch_limits09_08.pdf , <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7413948.stm> , Sharks at Risk: <http://www.pbs.org/kqed/oceanadventures/episodes/sharks/>).

The real reason for commercial shark tournaments is cash. Thousands of dollars in prizes are awarded to contestants with the heaviest sharks. In the end, commercial shark tournaments are simply contests that exploit sharks and depend on animal cruelty fueled by entry fees, prize money, and sponsorship revenues.

We understand that shark tournaments are not the only cause of death for sharks, and we are working to end other forms of mortality, such as finning and long-lining, as well. However, the fact that there are other causes of mortality does not justify the continuation of these shark tournaments. On behalf of The HSUS and our friends at fishpond USA, we urge you to take action to end the Mako Mania Shark Tournament as soon as possible.

Thank you very much.



John W. Grandy, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President
Wildlife and Habitat Protection
The Humane Society of the United States