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David O. Wiebers, M.D.

May 28, 2008

Richard Janis
General Manager
Star Island Yacht Club
P.O. Box 2180
Montauk Point, NY 11954

Dear Mr. Janis:

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States and our nationwide constituency of nearly 10 million, as well as our New York State membership of more than 392,000, I am writing to express our deep concern regarding the upcoming Star Island Yacht Club Shark Tournament in Montauk. For all the reasons that follow, I urge you to discontinue this cruel and inhumane shark killing tournament for the sake of the sharks themselves and the sake of the East Hampton, Long Island and New York communities.

Danger of Consumption of Mercury Concentrated in Shark Meat

For many years, shark tournaments such as the Star Island Tournament have attempted to justify the cruelty to and exploitation of sharks in their events by having the shark meat donated to food banks to feed the poor. However, this rationale has now been thoroughly belied by the fact that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are advising women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children to avoid some types of fish and eat fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury. Shark is first on their list of seafood items that should be avoided completely because of high levels of mercury. (See: <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/fishadvice/advice.html>)

After thoroughly considering this information as well as the conservation status of these beleaguered species, Long Island Cares, Inc., the Harry Chapin Food Bank, the leading anti-hunger organization and only food bank located on Long Island, has decided to reverse its policy of accepting and distributing shark meat from shark tournaments. Their Executive Director, Paule T. Pachter, stated that "after very careful review and discussion with our staff, we have decided to terminate any future acceptance or distribution of shark meat secured through any tournament or sport fishing events."

This action by a reputable and respected social agency removes any underpinning of social acceptability for these cash-fueled events. Now, we suggest, is the time for the Star Island Tournament to take the high road and cancel this killing for money tournament.

Cruelty and the Message of Shark Tournaments

There can be no denying the cruelty and utter inhumanity of events such as the Star Island Yacht Club Shark Tournament. These magnificent creatures, sometimes still barely alive, are hauled upon docks, weighed, and dismembered in grotesque display. All of this takes place in an atmosphere of carnival and induced cheering that welcomes the display and photographic exposure of each new arrival. Children are encouraged to revel in the death and dismemberment of these creatures; indeed, they are allowed to stand or sit near the front of the tournament weigh-in station so they don't miss anything. Nothing could be less educational or more degrading and demeaning to sharks than the cheers and jeers that greet the display and awarding of prize money for the biggest dead shark.

Dr. Carl Safina, founder of the Blue Ocean Institute (www.blueocean.org) and a life long fisherman, countered the idea that shark tournaments have educational aspects in a May 2008 article. "That's total b.s. It's grotesque to see them hanging upside down with their stomachs falling out of their mouths. That's not what a shark is like at all. This isn't about fishing. It's about gambling." (See: May 2008 issue of Vox Hamptons Magazine, p. 36).

To hear tournament proponents, one would think that the tournaments were critical to legitimate scientific research on sharks. That is just wrong. Science did not invent shark tournaments as a way of getting data. Indeed, the truth is that shark tournaments, which are now attracting greater and greater public criticism, try ever more in vain to use scientific inquiry as a justification for the needless death and maiming they cause.

Tournament supporters often claim that, because some shark tournaments have an element of "catch-and-release," these events inflict little harm on sharks. The fact is that at most tournaments, sharks are hooked, bled, suffocated, or repeatedly gaffed. The sharks that are released often die due to stress or traumatizing injuries. A shark that struggles for hours before being brought alongside a boat and being released may suffer physical injuries, trauma or stress that is so severe as to cause its death or traumatic abortion of its offspring. These events are hardly humane treatment or conservation, and are not justifiable as "catch and release".

Sharks Exploited in This Tournament are Threatened or Declining Worldwide

Mako, thresher, porbeagle, and blue sharks, some of the species targeted by the Star Island tournament, have ranges that extend into Canada, as far as Europe, and on down the east coast. They are in trouble throughout their ranges. Importantly, the Shark Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), an international scientific organization, has raised the level of concern for thresher, porbeagle, and mako sharks to "vulnerable," which is defined as "threatened with global extinction." The IUCN also found that blue sharks had declined 50-70% in the North Atlantic. In short, all species likely to be caught in these tournaments are the subject of significant international conservation concern.

Given the worldwide demise of shark populations, it is noteworthy that last year, the principle largest “winning” sharks were thresher sharks. Thresher sharks have been listed as a threatened species worldwide. (See lists of winning sharks for 2007 at <http://www.starislandyc.com/tournaments.asp>). Moreover, the Montauk tournament’s other categories of “winners” also included the largest dead blue and mako sharks, populations of both of which have declined precipitously over the last 20 years.

Recognized shark experts oppose the killing of sharks for sport or recreation. George Burgess, who directs the Florida Program for Shark Research at the Florida Museum of Natural History at the University of Florida, has documented the declines in virtually all shark species. He has also observed that, "Kill tournaments are bad for business in all sorts of ways. It's not just gruesome; it's just plain killing animals that don't need to be killed." Dr. Robert Hueter, Director of the famed Mote Marine Laboratory's Center for Shark Research, has gone on record against sport fishing for sharks, stating in meetings and in an interview with the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, "We ask fishermen not to kill sharks for sport and to remember that shark populations have been severely depleted by over-fishing." Shark tournaments promote the counterproductive idea that it doesn't matter what happens to sharks.

The critically acclaimed documentary *Sharkwater* focused attention on the plight of sharks across the globe, pointing out that the world is outraged that elephants are killed for ivory, yet silent on the deaths of a hundred million sharks a year, even though the worldwide distribution of sharks makes them more ecologically significant than elephants (<http://www.sharkwater.com/>). In recent months, other documentaries have focused attention on the now critical plight of sharks as well. See, for example, *Shark: Mind of a Demon* (<http://www.cbs.com/specials/shark/>) and theatrical releases such as *Sharks 3D* (<http://www.sharks3d.com/>). In addition, famed conservationist Jean-Michel Cousteau stated on his recent PBS documentary, "Now more than ever, two myths must be laid to rest. One, sharks are not mindless predators nor sinister man-eaters, and two, the oceans are not full of sharks." Continuing to kill sharks in tournaments promotes both of these myths.

Shark populations can ill afford the added mortality from tournaments. Indeed, shark tournaments encourage killing of the reproductively active and vital members of the population because they target and award cash prizes for the largest sharks. This year in the Star Island Yacht Club tournament, teams will be driven by competition for more than \$1,000,000 dollars in prize money for the largest dead sharks. In 2007, the winning dead shark for this tournament grossed prizes totaling \$466,000 with a total prize award significantly less than this year’s (see <http://www.starislandyc.com/tournaments.asp>) This excessive prize structure creates a catch and kill frenzy that puts the lie to any suggestion that this tournament is about anything other than big cash for big dead sharks.

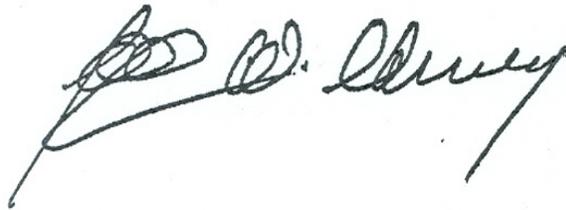
In the view of The Humane Society of the United States, it would be irresponsible to continue the Star Island Yacht Club Shark Tournament or to claim that the sharks are

killed for a good cause. This is not conservation or sound science, it is unconscionable exploitation.

It is time for a change in the way we view sharks and their protection. We ask you, on behalf of the East Hampton, Long Island and New York, to take a leadership position with respect to protecting sharks, and cancel the Star Island Yacht Club Shark Tournament.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Grandy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

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