

September 20, 2023

The Honorable Rob Wittman
U.S. House of Representatives
2055 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Darren Soto
U.S. House of Representatives
2353 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Garret Graves
U.S. House of Representatives
2402 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marc Veasey
U.S. House of Representatives
2348 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Wittman, Soto, Graves and Veasey,

As businesses that have experienced the negative impacts of shark depredation, we are writing to express our support for the Supporting the Health of Aquatic systems through Research, Knowledge and Enhanced Dialogue (SHARKED) Act. Collectively we represent charter captains, tackle shop owners, equipment manufacturers, and other sportfishing-related business leaders. Saltwater recreational fishing is a major economic driver in coastal communities throughout the country, with more than 13 million saltwater anglers supporting 595,000 jobs and generating \$98 billion in sales every year.

This bill brings focus to the increasing challenge of shark depredation, which negatively impacts fishing experiences, risks the safety of sharks and humans and threatens the sustainability of fish populations.

Shark depredation occurs when a shark eats or damages a hooked fish before an angler can reel in their catch. In general, the possibility of depredation occurring is accepted as a natural part of fishing. However, in recent years the frequency of shark depredation has increased rapidly in many parts of the country, likely due to increasing fishing activity, increasing shark abundance and depredation becoming a more frequently learned behavior.

As some of the nation's leading conservationists, recreational fishermen firmly believe that safeguarding our marine ecosystem is of utmost importance. Sharks play a vital role in maintaining balance in the marine ecosystem. However, shark depredation is escalating to a level that is detrimental to all involved, exposing sharks to potentially harmful fishing gear and putting anglers in dangerously close proximity to these apex predators. As the rate of shark depredation has increased, fishermen have become increasingly frustrated by the issue and a lack of response from the fisheries management community. It is a complex issue with no simple solution, but there are policy, research, management and education tactics that warrant exploration to help mitigate the issue. Shark depredation touches on many federal and state jurisdictions. Unfortunately, because no single entity has responsibility to address it, very little is being done.

The SHARKED Act would establish a task force that would be responsible for improving coordination and communication across the fisheries management community on shark depredation, as well as identifying research priorities and funding opportunities. This bill would be a critical first step toward addressing shark depredation nationally and establishing foundational knowledge that can be used to improve future management, education and research actions.

By implementing efforts to minimize interactions between sharks and anglers, the SHARKED Act will advance conservation for the benefit of sharks, anglers, fisheries and the economy. We are grateful for your support of this bill and for providing a voice to the recreational fishing industry.

Sincerely,

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National Manager, Dexter Outdoors
Southbridge, MA

Steve Atkinson
President, Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association
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Key Accounts Manager, Jones and Company
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Key West, FL

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North Palm Beach, FL

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Jupiter, FL

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Destin, FL

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