

JOHN BEL EDWARDS
GOVERNOR


State of Louisiana
DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

JACK MONToucET
SECRETARY

July 7, 2017

Mr. Acy Cooper
President
Louisiana Shrimp Association
P.O. Box 1088
Grand Isle, Louisiana 70358

RE: Shark Fin Trade Elimination Act of 2017, S. 793, H.R. 1456

Acy,

As requested by you on June 7, 2017, the department has reviewed the text of Senate bill 793 and House Resolution 1456, also known as the "Shark Fin Trade Elimination Act of 2017" and the "Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act of 2017", respectively. The bills, in their current form, would place unnecessary economic burdens on Louisiana shark fishermen. As long as responsible management is in place, which is currently the case for sharks in the Gulf of Mexico, there is no need for this legislation.

The purpose of these bills as stated by the authors is to "curtail the act of 'finning' sharks while reducing the U.S. contribution to the global shark fin market." The practice of shark finning is already illegal in the United States and Louisiana and has been since the 2000s. All sharks landed in Louisiana must have their fins naturally attached until landed. Once a shark is landed in Louisiana, these fins may then be removed and processed separately.

Information available on NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service commercial statistics website shows that in 2015, 17,059 kilograms (37,530 pounds) of shark fins were exported from the United States to other countries while 24,016 kilograms (52,835 pounds) of shark fins were imported from other countries. The total estimated global shark fin trade, was an estimated 17,500 metric tons (according to a 2015 F.A.O. report on the state of the global market for shark products). These U.S. total imports and exports amount to less than 1% of shark fins traded globally. This bill will likely have little impact on the global trade in shark fins, especially the illegal trade of shark fins. The majority of shark fin exports do not move through the United States. The majority of fins exported from the United States, in the past, moved through California to the Hong Kong Market. However, since the California ban on shark fins in 2015, the shark fin trade now mainly flows through Mexico and Canada in North America. These bills will do little to reduce global trade or curtail illegal practices on the high seas, but will economically impact responsible U.S. fishermen. Data for 2016 were not yet available.

Sharks are indeed a vital part of the marine ecosystem, however those sharks harvested in the United States, along with their fins, are sustainably harvested in accordance with regulations and quotas established by the NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Division and the State of Louisiana. By eliminating a domestic market for legally harvested fins, this legislation will only have adverse impacts on Louisiana fishermen who legally harvest sharks and their fins as well as the coastal fishing

communities where they live. These bills will create unnecessary regulatory waste of legally harvested shark parts by not allowing fishermen to sell fins from a legally harvestable shark species. These bills ban one part, the most valuable part, of an otherwise legally harvestable animal creating a situation in which an entire fishery would effectively be shut down. They will either not affect global shark fin markets, or at worst, will encourage further development of unregulated harvest to replace the regulated US landings.

The shark fishery is an important winter fishery in Louisiana as it provides a critical seasonal source of income to a number of commercial fishermen until other fisheries open later in the year.

Possible alternative measures to allow the legal shark fishery of the U.S. to continue to harvest and sell legally obtained fins while working to reduce illegal finning practices:

- 1) Legislation mandating tracking and traceability of legally harvested fins as opposed to an outright ban.
- 2) Provide for tracking and traceability measures of imported and exported fins to determine legal origin of those fins originating from or entering into the U.S.
- 3) Prohibit the importation or exportation of shark fins that can't be verified to have come from legally landed sharks.

If you have any further questions regarding this issue, please feel free to contact Jason Adriance at jadriance@wlf.la.gov or at 504.284.2032.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jack Montoucet", written over a horizontal line.

Jack Montoucet
Secretary