



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committees on Judiciary and Ways & Means
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HB553 HD2 SD1 – RELATING TO THE PROTECTION OF SHARKS

Chairs Rhoads and Dela Cruz, Vice Chairs Keohokalole and Keith-Agaran, and members of the Committees:

The Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology recognizes the ecological and cultural importance of sharks in Hawai'i and supports the intent of this measure to help protect sharks within state waters, but wishes to offer the following comments. Scientific research is a critical tool for understanding the behaviors and ecology of sharks, as well as any potential anthropogenic threats that could impact their survival. HIMB catch and release records show that all size ranges of sharks are captured during scientific fishing – from neonates to very large adults approaching maximum size, which is a sign of a healthy population. Recent data (2017) obtained via remote underwater camera systems also suggests that shark populations in Hawai'i may be utilizing deep water refugia, which could result in underestimation of some species using only traditional visual surveys done by divers.

Shark research at UH has always promoted and contributed to the conservation of sharks in Hawai'i. For example, early tracking research conducted by HIMB scientists (and funded by DLNR) provided information that led to endorsement by a Governor's Shark Task Force and subsequent change in state policy to no longer conduct shark hunts after shark attacks. This single piece of research alone has probably saved several hundred sharks since the policy was adopted. Tracking research also uses barbless hooks and releases all animals alive and unharmed. More recently, DLNR also requested and funded HIMB research on Maui to investigate the reasons behind the higher incidence of shark attacks on that island. These results have been published and disseminated through local media.

All of this research for the past two decades has been conducted under the review of an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). IACUC oversees all vertebrate (including sharks) research in Hawai'i to comply with rigorous federal policies set forth by the National Institutes of Health. IACUC requires scientists to explain the reason why the

research is worthwhile and to ensure humane and appropriate treatment of the animals - for instance, to specify the manner in which they are captured and restrained (such as using barbless hooks and inducing tonic immobility by placing the animals upside down while still in the water) and appropriate attachment of tags (using mixed metals that corrode over time and allow for the tag to fall off). The protocols are reviewed by veterinarians, scientists, and non-scientists.

UH previously supported version HB 553 HD1 of this bill, which included exemption for researchers operating under an IACUC protocol, and would request a return to similar language in the bill:

(f) This section shall not apply to:

- (1) Special activity permits issued under section 187A-6; or to research overseen by a state approved institutional animal care and use committee (IACUC).