

June 12, 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 2051

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,

The undersigned recreational fishing and fisheries conservation and science organizations write to express our strong support for the Supporting the Health of Aquatic systems through Research, Knowledge and Enhanced Dialogue (SHARKED) Act. 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, especially along the Atlantic coast, the southeastern U.S. and the western Pacific. The causes are generally recognized to be 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 clearly detrimental to anglers and predated fish that would otherwise be released. It also creates an unnatural food source for sharks and exposes them to potentially harmful fishing gear. 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. Shark depredation touches on many federal and state jurisdictions, but 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 look forward to working with your offices to achieve its passage.

Sincerely,

American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
BoatUS
Bonefish & Tarpon Trust
Center for Sportfishing Policy
Coastal Conservation Association
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Guy Harvey Foundation
International Game Fish Association
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas
National Marine Manufacturers Association
National Professional Anglers Association
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership