

PRESS RELEASE

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The Let Sharks Live Network

2009:

THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE SHARK



As the hands of the clock approach midnight for sharks, organizations working for their protection have joined forces in a global communication network named **Let Sharks Live**, and declared **2009 The International Year of the Shark**. The motion aims to raise global awareness of their imminent extinction and the oceanic crisis at hand.

Recent findings of the **Global Shark Assessment** indicate that at current rates of decline, extinction of the most threatened species of shark is forecast in 10 to 15 years. In large regions, species that were once numerous have fallen to 1% of

their original numbers, in a massacre comparable to that of the buffalo on the North American plains 200 years ago, but on a much larger scale. For example, in the Mediterranean Sea there is a 97 to 99.5% decline in shark numbers. Studies of oceanic sharks estimate 80 to 90% of heavily fished species are gone. Yet these intelligent animals, also called the "Wolves of the Sea" are still fished intensively, and finned, usually while still alive, for shark fin soup. "The oceans have evolved over hundreds of millions of years with sharks as apex predators, so their loss will destroy oceanic health." Ila France Porcher, founder of the think tank network, explains.

Some of the issues to be addressed include:

- Convincing the consumers of shark fin soup that shark finning is unsustainable and that the dish must be made using a substitute for the shark fins. Shark fin soup is a tasteless delicacy whose main use in the Far East is to display high social status. If there is no market, the slaughter will cease.
- Educating the public regarding the true nature of sharks and their threatened status, to counter the effects of shark attack hysteria, as spread by the mass media, and which for years has posed a serious barrier to their protection.
- Obtaining protection for threatened species
- Solving the problem of the slaughter resulting from the use of shark nets and drum lines, used to protect beaches in some areas
- Reducing by-catch losses, and the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limits defined in fisheries law
- Promoting marine protected areas, and enforcing protection of sharks within existing ones.
- Persuading shark fishermen to practise tag and release only, rather than killing the sharks they fish.

The threats sharks face in this modern world of human domination are daunting. The enormous scale of commercial long-line fishing and by-catch, the methodical massacre for shark fin soup, habitat loss and destruction, particularly of nursery areas, pollution, and a variety of smaller operations that have great impact taken together, are the main threats to the future of sharks.

"Our goal is to see the retreat of these magnificent animals from extinction's horizon." says Alex Buttigieg, co-founder of the network.

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Notes to the Editor:

The **Global Shark Assessment** was launched by Dr. Ransom Myers in October of 2003 to assess how global shark populations have changed since the beginning of industrial scale fishing, and to make predictions about how these populations will respond to global climate change and to different methods of fishing.

The **Let Sharks Live Network** was inspired by the finding that at current rates of decline, extinction is indicated for a high fraction of shark species in 10 to 15 years. We took advantage of the communication potential of Internet to link together with other shark protection organizations in a global Internet network and think tank, something that has never been possible before.

Shark Finning is the practise of taking sharks with nets or long-lining, hauling them on board, slashing off their fins and tails, and throwing the rest of the animal away to die slowly as it sinks into the crushing densities of the abyss. Only 5% of the animal is used. Shark finning has only been practised intensively since the 1980's and has already succeeded in nearly emptying the oceans, reefs, and continental shelves, of sharks.

