

TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL
RESOURCES

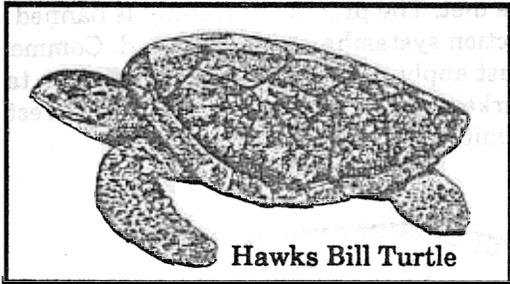
DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Environmentalists Win Giant Victory for Sea Turtles

San Francisco (January 4, 1996) -- In a ruling that is being called one of the greatest legal conservation



Hawks Bill Turtle

victories for sea turtles, a federal judge has ruled that all countries that export shrimp to the United States

must adopt

sea turtle conservation measures for their shrimp fleet by May 1 or face an embargo of their shrimp products. The lawsuit was filed by Earth Island Institute, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, The Humane Society of the United States, and the Sierra Club.

The lawsuit was filed under a 1989 provision of the Endangered Species Act that required foreign vessels to reduce turtle mortality to levels comparable to those of the U.S. shrimp fleet as of May 1, 1992, as a condition for exporting shrimp to the United States. The judge directed the Secretaries of State, Treasury and Commerce to prohibit, no later than May 1, 1996, the importation of shrimp or shrimp products wherever harvested in the wild with commercial fishing technology which may adversely affect species of sea turtle.

The court ruling compels the State Department to ban shrimp imports from all nations (approximately 70) that have not reduced sea turtle mortality from shrimp fishing operations by 97 percent, the level that can be achieved with proper use of Turtle Excluder Devices on all vessels. TEDs have been required on most U.S. shrimp trawlers since 1989.

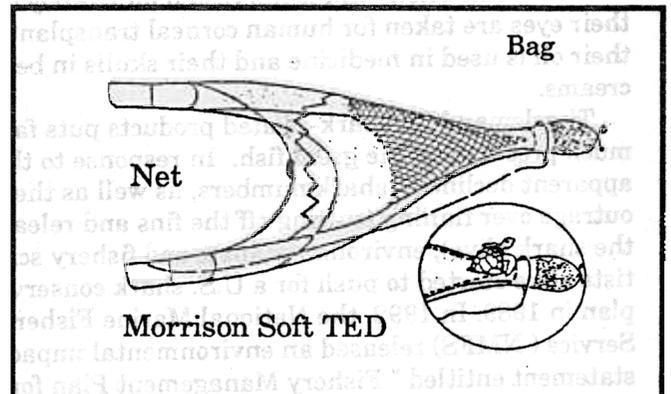
"This lawsuit has successfully accomplished what we set out to do: end the government's violation of the law in order to protect those vulnerable marine animals from ultimate extinction," said Josh Floum, an attorney from Heller, Ehrman, White and McAuliffe, which is representing environmentalists pro bono. Dr. John W. Grandy, a vice president of The Humane Society of the United States, said, "By accepting shrimp imports from countries that do not require their fleets to use TEDs, the U.S. inevitably contributes to the needless deaths of thousands of sea turtles. This is a wonderful victory for the turtles."

For more information, contact the Sea Turtle Restoration Project, seaturtles@earthisland.org or 415/488-

What is a TED?

The incidental capture and drowning of sea turtles in shrimp trawls is a significant cause of turtle mortality. All sea turtles in the United States waters are Federally listed as endangered or threatened. Current regulations require the use of TEDs in specified waters during certain seasons.

A TED ("Trawling Efficiency Device", or "Turtle Excluder Device") is a piece of gear which is inserted into a shrimp trawl to exclude unwanted sea turtles. Currently, seven different TED designs are available for commercial use in the southeast. One of these devices is the Morrison Soft TED.



The Morrison Soft TED is a deflector panel of eight-inch stretched mesh webbing installed on the inside of a shrimp trawl. In theory, shrimp pass through the mesh of the panel and into the bag, while larger organisms such as sea turtles are deflected up and out of the net. By excluding turtles and other by-catch, mortality of these is greatly reduced and the quality of the shrimp caught is increased since no large objects crush them in the net.

Quote

"The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant: 'What good is it?' If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering."

- Leonard

Who's the Real Killer?

The numbers say it all. Each year an average of 25 people across the world die as a result of shark attack. You have a one in 300 million chance of meeting your maker in the mouth of a shark. The sharks, on the other hand, wish they had our odds.

The Department of Commerce estimates that people kill 100 million sharks a year. Sharks fall prey to sport and commercial fishing alike, and the one-two punch is having a serious impact on their numbers. Compounding the increasing problem of low numbers is the fact that sharks have very low reproductive rates.

Until recently, sharks were considered both commercially worthless and a menace. In the wake of the 1975 film *Jaws*, there arose a plague of shark fishing contests. In these so-called "monster hunts," fishermen would haul in the biggest sharks they could find. In these events sportsmen could nab prizes up to \$ 60,000.

Now the commercial industry is beginning to capitalize on the growing demand for shark products. The Department of Commerce reported that the U.S. shark catch skyrocketed from 148 tons in 1979 to 7,144 tons in 1989.

Sharks provide a host of consumer goods in addition to their meat. Their skin is harvested for cowboy boots, their eyes are taken for human corneal transplants, their oil is used in medicine and their skulls in beauty creams.

The demand for shark-related products puts far too much pressure on the great fish. In response to the apparent decline in shark numbers, as well as the public outrage over finning (cutting off the fins and releasing the shark alive), environmentalists and fishery scientists alike started to push for a U.S. shark conservation plan in 1989. In 1992, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) released an environmental impact statement entitled "Fishery Management Plan for Sharks of the Atlantic Ocean."

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Trees were saved by printing on recycled paper

The plan sets the maximum sustainable yield, the most fish that can be landed while leaving a sustainable population, at 8,760 tons for all species of shark.

The NMFS plan adds that large coastal species have been overfished since 1987, and that other species are seen as being "fully utilized".

Of the 350 species of sharks worldwide, the NMFS plan addresses 73 living in the Atlantic. Acknowledging the lack of information regarding individual species, NMFS simply divides them into three categories: large coastal, small coastal and pelagic sharks. Quotas are set for each group, and fisheries are obligated to close when quotas are met. The practice of finning is banned and a data collection system has been launched. Commercial outfits must apply for a federal shark permit to take the fish to market, while recreational anglers are restricted to a bag limit of four per boat, per trip.



Black-tip Shark

Sharks are not only graceful and awe-inspiring, but an integral link in oceanic ecosystems. To lose sharks to carelessness and greed would be an inexcusable crime. With continual vigilance in the U.S. and cooperation abroad, these ecologically important and wonder-inspiring creatures may stand a chance of making a comeback. We have nothing to gain from the loss. Contact: National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3232/(301)713-2347.



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