

Congressional committee passes legislation that would strengthen ban on shark finning

(Washington, D.C. – June 11) – The House Natural Resources Committee today passed legislation that would strengthen U.S. efforts to conserve sharks and help put a definitive end to the cruel and wasteful practice of shark finning in U.S. waters.

The legislation, introduced by Rep. Madelaine Bordallo (D-Guam), would close a loophole in the law that has allowed some people to get past the ban by finning sharks from vessels not legally classified as “fishing vessels.” The Committee also passed a strengthening amendment introduced by Rep. Eni Faleomavaega (D-AS) that would require fishers to land sharks with their fins naturally attached to their bodies in all U.S. waters. The amendment would help ensure that sharks are not finned at sea and enhance the collection of data needed for shark population assessment.

“Chairwoman Bordallo’s bill and Representative Faleomavaega’s amendment will together ensure sharks are better protected from finning in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans,” said Jeffrey Flocken, Washington, DC Office Director of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). “We applaud the Committee’s action today under the leadership of Chairman Rahall, which made a landmark U.S. conservation law even stronger.”

Despite the 8-year-old ban on shark finning, law enforcement and fisheries management agencies believe that shark finning is still occurring on merchant or other ships not usually engaged in fishing. Enforcement personnel also have trouble enforcing the ban because of a complicated provision in the law that allows shark fins to be separated from carcasses at sea and retained on board ships as long they weighed no more than 5% of the weight of the shark carcasses. Some fishers simply “mix-and-match” higher-value fins to higher-value carcasses and discard lower value carcasses and fins into the open water. The Shark Conservation Act of 2008, as amended and passed by the Committee, would eliminate the 5% ratio and replace it with the clear requirement that all sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached, as well as clarify that finning was banned from all ships, not just those classified as “fishing vessels.”

“Conservationists, scientists and enforcement agencies agree that a fins-attached policy must be established to truly enforce a shark finning ban and to collect data necessary to monitor shark populations,” said Flocken. “More than half of shark species are in danger of disappearing forever, but today’s action by the Committee will help give these persecuted animals a fighting chance at survival.”