HB 1706 H.D.3 S.D.1
RELATING TO FISHERIES

Senate Committee on Water, Land and Hawaiian Affairs

Public Hearing, April 5, 1999
1:00 p.m., Room 225, State Capitol

By
John Harrison, Environmental Center
Richard Brock, Sea Grant
Bruce Carlson, Aquarium

HB 1706 H.D.3, S.D.1 would amend Chapter 188, HRS, to prohibit the harvest, possession, purchase, sale, or trade of shark fins unless the fins were taken from a shark landed whole in the State.

Our comments on this measure are compiled from voluntarily submitted opinions of the listed academic sources, and as such, do not constitute an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

Our reviewers strongly concur that the practice of "finning" is wasteful, as well as ecologically unwise. However, we note that at the reported prices and considering the nonselective nature of longlining and the size of the incidental shark catch, specific legislation such as proposed in this measure will be required to curtail this practice. Enacting this legislation will have the additional benefit of providing an economic stimulus to encourage development of a processing industry for whole sharks. Those boats with appropriate storage capacities could remain profitably involved in the shark fishery, while longliners lacking space to store sharks would be induced to release hooked sharks.

In response to the objection that use of the term, "whole" requires that the shark not be dressed (i.e., gutted and rinsed) at sea, those familiar with shark anatomy know that the liver comprises the major part of a shark's internal organs. Sharks use the low-molecular weight compound, squalene, stored in the liver, for buoyancy compensation. Squalene, as well, is one of the most commercially valuable parts of the shark and is rich in vitamin A. Hence, for commercial purposes, it is in the fisherman's interest to land the shark "whole".

In addition, the argument has been made that this measure will interrupt an ongoing profitable enterprise of local fishermen. If such a practice is currently ongoing, it is being pursued illegally, as no reporting of shark catch has been provided to the DLNR as required under current law.