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HB 29
MAKING AN APPROPRIATION FOR A HELICOPTER SHARK WATCH PROGRAM

House Committee on
Ocean and Marine Resources

Public Hearing - January 28, 1993
8:30 A.M., Room 1310 SOT

By
John T. Harrison, Environmental Coordinator
Bruce Carlson, Waikiki Aquarium
Kim Holland, Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology
James Parrish, Hawaii Cooperative Fishery Unit
Ray Tabata, Sea Grant

HB 29 appropriates funds for FY 1993-1994 to implement a shark watch program, providing surveillance focusing on high risk areas of the state’s coastline.

Our statement on this bill does not constitute an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

Certainly, any program that may increase our understanding of the behavior and occurrence of sharks would be desirable, as present data are patently insufficient. To the degree that the scientific component of the program were well designed and integrated into the protective mission, our reviewers strongly support this intent. However, despite the apparent increase in frequency of attacks on humans in Hawaii in recent months, a statistical analysis of the historical record remains inconclusive with regard to discernment of a clear trend. Shark attacks are so rare and so variable in frequency that it will be extremely difficult to determine if the proposed program is effective, even if no attacks occur over a period of several years.

In addition, it is not clear that potentially dangerous animals are going to be detectable from the air, since sharks are only visible under relatively clear conditions when they are at or near the surface. It would seem that a flight plan to provide comprehensive coverage of populated coastlines would be prohibitively expensive. Perhaps alternative equipment or methods
might be more cost effective, but such an initiative would require a different bill, given the specificity of this measure's title.