April 29, 2013

A.1769-B Maisel/S.1711-B Grisanti

Bill Summary: This bill prohibits the possession, sale, offering for sale, trade, or distribution of shark fins.

Justification: Healthy oceans undoubtedly depend on sharks. As top predators, sharks help to manage healthy ocean ecosystems. And as the number of large sharks declines, the oceans will suffer unpredictable and devastating consequences. Sharks help maintain the health of ocean ecosystems, including sea grass beds and coral reefs.

Shark populations are on the decline due to over-fishing and their inability to reproduce at the same rate at which they are being fished. The practice is not only unsustainable, but also extremely barbaric. A shark is caught, its fins cut off and the still-living body is dumped back into the ocean, still alive. Without their fins, the sharks can’t swim, and usually drown because they cannot move to force water through their gills for oxygen. They may starve to death or be slowly eaten by other fish. Tens of millions of sharks die this way each year.

Several key roles sharks play in oceanic ecosystems include: 1) maintaining biodiversity by preventing one species from monopolizing resources. Sharks play a key role as apex predators helping to maintain a complex ecosystem; 2) preventing the loss of coral reefs through a balanced food web. The loss of sharks in a reef ecosystem can trigger a chain reaction that is felt throughout the entire food web. The removal of sharks from the coral reef ecosystem can ultimately affect the resilience of coral reefs to disturbance, leading to a homogeneous habitat with declines in species diversity and abundance; 3) keeping prey populations healthy through Darwinian-style “survival of the fittest.” Sharks prey on the sick and...
weak members of prey populations. This prevents the spread of disease and outbreaks that can be devastating to lesser species’ populations. With sharks as apex predators, it constitutes larger numbers of healthier prey fish; and 4) Keeping sea grass beds and other vital habitats healthy. Sharks regulate the behavior of prey species through intimidation, and prevent them from overgrazing vital habitats. Overall, the roles sharks play within the oceanic ecosystem is vitally important to the overall health of the oceans.

The practice of shark finning is currently banned in New York, however, it is not prohibited from being sold or distributed. This legislation would set a critically important precedent for other states where shark finning and the sale of shark fins are currently legal. The only exception would be to allow the Dept of Environmental Conservation to issue permits for research and education purposes. States such as California, Washington, Oregon and Hawaii have all banned shark finning. By taking the additional step of not allowing the possession or sale/distribution of shark fins, we can ensure that these magnificent creatures are offered the protection they deserve.

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Urges Your Support Of A.1769-B/S.1711-B