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The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, & Education

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HISTORIC OREGON LEGISLATION PROTECTS SHARKS

Oregon Governor Signed HB 2838 into Law Today, Making
the State Second in the Continental U.S. to Ban Shark Fins

Salem, Oregon – 04 August 2011 -- The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, and Education, known more commonly by its acronym "COARE", applauds the the State of Oregon for its adoption of House Bill 2838 (authored by Representative Brad Witt) and Governor John Kitzhaber for formally signing that Bill into law today. Since its inception, COARE has been actively addressing shark conservation issues, and attempts to reduce shark fin consumption in the U.S. and worldwide.

Oregon is now the second State in the continental U.S. to enact a legislative ban on shark fins, and this law represents a significant step towards reducing pressure on rapidly declining shark populations. Oregon's ban complements similar legislation signed into law on 12 May 2011 by Washington Governor Chris Gregoire, as well as pending legislation in California, which passed California's State Assembly, and is currently being heard in the Senate. Oregon's new ban is also preceded by legislative bans already adopted by the State of Hawai'i, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Fiji, and the Bahamas.

House Bill (HB) 2838 was introduced to the Oregon State Legislature on 11 January 2011 by Representative Brad Witt (D-Clatskanie) to prohibit the possession, sale, trade, and distribution of shark fins in Oregon. Western ports such as those in Oregon and California are major entry points for shark fin distribution in the United States.

"All too often shark fins are obtained by means of a barbaric practice commonly referred to as finning. This involves the taking of sharks solely for the purpose of harvesting their fins, while the rest of the fish is usually wasted," said Representative Witt.

Every year, fins from up to 73 million sharks are used for shark fin soup, a dish traditionally served at Chinese weddings and banquets. This soup has grown in popularity, increasing consumer demand for shark fins and contributing to the decimation of shark populations worldwide as millions of sharks are killed every month, many for their fins alone. As a result of these fishing pressures, one-third of shark species are already threatened with extinction.

As sharks play a vital role in the oceans, their depletion could cause irreparable damage to marine ecosystems. "Sharks are one of our oceans' top predators, keeping the entire ecosystem in check, but shark populations have declined dramatically over the last few decades as a result of human greed and

lack of understanding," said Christopher Chin, COARE's Executive Director. Animals at the top of the food chain, such as sharks, have few natural predators, so they are slow to mature, and have very few young. "As a result, they are extremely sensitive to fishing pressures, and are slow to recover from overfishing", continued Chin.

While the support for Oregon's ban, as well as for its predecessors in Washington, Hawai'i, Guam, and CNMI, has been nearly unequivocal, similar pending legislation in California is meeting with some resistance. Opponents to California's Assembly Bill (AB) 376, claim that it is an imposition on Chinese culture, and that some sharks are plentiful; however, "since such a large percentage of sharks are already considered endangered, and since the practice of finning is conducted without regard to species, age, or gender, it is no surprise that even endangered species are being slaughtered", said Chin. DNA sequencing of a recent sampling of fins for sale in San Francisco revealed that endangered species, such as the great hammerhead (*Sphyrna mokarran*), are represented on San Francisco shelves.

"We find that many Chinese and Chinese-Americans simply don't understand the issues. If people knew more about these animals and their crucial role in the ocean, they would want to protect them", continued Chin. While surveying Chinese restaurants in San Francisco, COARE found a significant number of restaurateurs that served the controversial soup only because they believed their customers expected it. "This bill helps directly address those informational shortcomings, and provides a simple solution for those who requested, 'make it illegal so we don't have to sell it'," reported Chin.

Oregon House Bill (HB) 2838 passed both the House of Representatives and Oregon State Senate unanimously, with votes of 44-0 and 30-0, respectively. The House of Representatives subsequently voted with an overwhelming 58-1 to concur with minor amendments made in the Senate. "We are absolutely thrilled by Oregon's leadership," said Chin. "These resolute and decisive votes set a very clear direction and provide a strong example and act to follow. If legislators in other jurisdictions have been harboring doubt about which direction to take, the choice should now be clear."

COARE began development of its Shark Safe program in early-2007 seeking to protect sharks by raising awareness of threats to shark populations and by reducing the demand for shark products. In 2007, COARE also teamed up with WildAid to launch the Shark Friendly Communities campaign. "By increasing public awareness of the need for shark conservation, we endeavor to change the way people think about sharks, thereby reducing the sale, use, and trade of shark products", Chin said. "We're really excited about this new law and the similar legislation that is pending in California. We have been working on this concept for a number of years, and it's wonderful to finally see it to take form."

About COARE

The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, and Education, Inc. (COARE) is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Its purpose is to study our oceans and increase public awareness of the earth's marine environment through educational programs and outreach. COARE seeks to enlighten people, young and old, to the plight of the oceans, to change the way they think and act, and to encourage them to create positive and lasting change. For more information about COARE, and the Shark Safe certification program, visit <http://www.coare.org> and <http://www.sharksafe.org>.

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