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The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, & Education

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## **CALIFORNIA SENATE MAKES HISTORIC MOVE TO PROTECT SHARKS**

Assembly Bill 376 Adopted by the California State Senate Today

**Sacramento, California – 06 September 2011** -- The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, and Education, known more commonly by its acronym "COARE", applauds the California State Senate for its passage of State Assembly Bill 376 (Fong, Huffman). Since its inception, COARE has been actively addressing shark conservation issues, and attempts to reduce shark fin consumption in the U.S. and worldwide.

Assembly Bill (AB) 376 was introduced to the California State Assembly on 14 February 2011 by Assemblymembers Paul Fong (D-Cupertino) and Jared Huffman (D-San Rafael), and subsequently passed the Assembly on 23 May 2011 with a vote of 65-8. The bill today passed the Senate with a vote of 25-9, and the bill now moves on to the governor for action.

California is now one step closer to helping the West Coast of the United States enact a full ban on the trade of shark fins, which will help reduce pressure on rapidly declining shark populations. California's proposed ban complements similar legislation recently signed into law in Washington State and Oregon, and is also preceded by legislative bans adopted by the State of Hawai'i, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI).

California is one of the largest sources of demand for shark fin outside Asia and is a major entry for shark fin distribution in the United States. This legislation represents a significant step towards reducing pressure on rapidly declining shark populations.

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.

"Sharks have shaped ocean ecosystems for more than 400 million years, but we've pushed many of them to the brink of extinction just in our lifetimes. This new law represents a much needed shift in the way we treat our ocean's fragile resources, said Alexandra Cousteau, founder of Blue Legacy and granddaughter of conservation pioneer Jacques-Yves Cousteau.

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.

"I'm pleased that California can take part in the worldwide movement to protect these important creatures, and that we can continue to provide leadership in important environmental matters," said California Assemblymember Paul Fong, the bill's primary author. "We're grateful for organizations like COARE, which have provided invaluable support throughout this process."

"This is a bold, but very necessary and natural step," said Chin. "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", continued 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 some 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.

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 AB 376 co-sponsor 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", said Chin. "Nowhere else has this matter seen such resistance, but it's been an arduous battle here. We're thrilled that the California Legislature has done the right thing, and seen past the grouching of special interests."

### **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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