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Heading into ‘Shark Week,’ Discovery Channel Makes Major Push for Kerry Shark Legislation

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senator John Kerry (D-Mass.) today announced he's partnering with Discovery Channel to help end the illegal practice of shark finning and promote shark protection. Throughout ‘Shark Week,’ the Channel’s highly popular annual event, now in its 22nd year, Discovery will run public service announcements and push an online campaign encouraging viewers to call their senators to support Kerry’s shark preservation efforts. For Discovery Channel, these efforts mark a new phase in their work to promote shark conservation.

“Huge demands on the foreign fin trade have fueled massive population declines and a serious disruption of our waters,” said Kerry. “We need much stronger solutions to finally end this illicit trade, and current protections haven’t gotten the job done. We need to get serious, and I’m thrilled to see Discovery Channel’s willingness to roll up its sleeves and help get the job done.”

Shark finning, a practice where fisherman slice off a shark’s fin primarily for use in shark fin soup, seriously disrupts marine ecosystems and has led to a seventy-five percent decrease in certain shark populations over the last fifteen years. In April, Kerry introduced the Shark Preservation Act of 2009 to close a loophole for shark fin transport and strengthen enforcement measures to ensure sharks are transported with their fins attached.

Earlier this month, the Pew Environment Group brought shark attack survivors to Capitol Hill to lobby congress to pass Senator Kerry’s legislation.

In addition to Discovery’s ‘Shark Week’ campaign, sister network Planet Green will partner with conservation groups to launch “Blue August,” a month-long content initiative on the human impacts on marine life.

The online petition can be found here. ‘Shark Week’ begins August 2.

The full text of Discovery Channel’s endorsement letter is below:

Dear Senator Kerry:

Hundreds of thousands of sharks are fished out of our oceans each day. Many shark populations are in serious decline. In the U.S. Atlantic, scientists estimate that hammerhead sharks -- species sought primarily for their fins -- have decreased by nearly 90 percent over the last 20 years. Sharks play a vital role in ecosystems, maintaining
the balance of life in the ocean by feeding on prey populations, thereby keeping them in check. Scientists warn that removing sharks will have cascading consequences throughout the entire marine world.

For this reason Discovery Channel fully supports The Shark Conservation Act of 2009 (S. 850). We applaud you for introducing this critical legislation to help strengthen the U.S. ban on shark finning, improve shark fisheries data and encourage international shark conservation. We also applaud Rep. Madeleine Bordallo for introducing and moving this legislation through the House of Representatives.

As the #1 non-fiction media company in the world, Discovery Communications strives to educate and inform viewers about our planet. The flagship network, Discovery Channel, reaches over 98 million viewers in the U.S. alone and is committed to providing the highest quality content on television.

In its 22nd year, Discovery’s Shark Week – watched by almost 30 million people each year – has become a perennial favorite among viewers who want to learn more about this powerful and often misunderstood creature. Discovery highlights historical shark events, scientific findings and little known behavior with compelling footage and premiere storytelling.

Discovery is partnering with Ocean Conservancy once again this year on a public service announcement campaign, to air throughout Shark Week, with the goal of educating viewers about the plight of sharks and encouraging them to take action. Putting all of our media weight behind this effort, the PSAs will direct viewers to discovery.com. There they will find an online petition encouraging them to join Discovery and Ocean Conservancy to put an end to shark finning and ensure that the U.S. is a leader in shark conservation.

In addition, Discovery’s sister network Planet Green is partnering with Ocean Conservancy and several other conservation organizations to launch “Blue August,” a month-long, multiplatform initiative that shines a spotlight on humankind’s impact on all things aquatic, from the world’s oceans and their inhabitants to our precious fresh water resources.

Again, thank you for your leadership on this critical issue. We look forward to working with you to strengthen the enforcement of domestic shark finning regulations and promote shark conservation around the globe.

Sincerely,

John Ford

President & General Manager, Discovery Channel