

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 401 Shark Fins

SPONSOR(S): Jacobs and others

TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 680

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
1) Agriculture & Natural Resources Subcommittee	12 Y, 2 N	Mears	Moore
2) Business & Professions Subcommittee	13 Y, 2 N	Thompson	Anstead
3) State Affairs Committee			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Shark finning is the process of catching a shark, removing its fins, and discarding the rest of the shark. Approximately 100 million sharks per year are killed, or 11,417 sharks per hour, a rate that is considered overfishing, which could lead to extinction. This practice decimates shark populations around the world and changes the ocean's ecosystem.

Congress banned shark finning in U.S. waters in 2000 under the Shark Conservation Act, and shark finning has been banned in many countries worldwide. However, the trade of lawfully acquired shark fins is not prohibited. Shark fins command a high price and hold significant cultural value in some countries, yielding more value per pound than the shark's body.

In Florida, a fisherman may only catch one shark per day, and each vessel is limited to two sharks per day, even if more than two fishermen are on board. Fishermen may only catch sharks by hook and line gear. All sharks harvested in Florida waters must be brought ashore with the fin attached to the shark's body.

Florida law prohibits the possession of a shark fin separated from the shark unless such possession is authorized by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission or the fin was obtained on land, was prepared by taxidermy, and is possessed for the purposes of display.

The bill prohibits the import, export, and sale of shark fins.

The bill may have an indeterminate fiscal impact on the state. See Fiscal Comments.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Background

Shark Finning

Shark finning is the process of catching a shark, removing its fins, and discarding the rest of the shark.¹ Shark finners often throw the shark back into the ocean alive once they have removed the fins. Unable to swim properly, the shark either bleeds to death or suffocates.

Shark fins command a high price and hold significant cultural value in some countries. Considered a symbol of status in Chinese culture, shark fin soup is a popular dish at weddings and other special occasions. Shark fins yield more value per pound than the shark's body.²

The practice of shark finning decimates shark populations around the world. The UN estimates that 73 million sharks are killed for their fins every year.³ Humans kill approximately 100 million sharks globally each year, or 11,417 sharks per hour, a rate that is considered overfishing, which could lead to extinction.⁴ A shark's slow growth and low reproductive rates make sharks highly susceptible to extinction because they cannot replenish their populations as quickly as they are being destroyed.⁵

A dramatic shark population plunge poses a threat not only to sharks, but also to the entire ecosystem. When shark populations decrease, a ripple effect may spread throughout the rest of the ecosystem, creating an imbalance. For example, the loss of the smooth hammerheads caused their prey, rays, to increase. The larger ray population now can eat more scallops, clams, and other bivalves. This not only hurts the bivalve populations and, therefore, the biodiversity of the ecosystem, it also harms human fisheries.⁶

In response to concerns about growing shark harvests internationally, many countries have banned shark fishing in their waters. In addition, many other nations have adopted finning bans, including the Bahamas, Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, the Maldives, Nicaragua, Palau, Panama, and Taiwan.⁷

The United States Congress banned shark finning in U.S. waters in 2000.⁸ The Shark Conservation Act makes it unlawful for any person:

- To remove any of the fins of a shark (including the tail) at sea;
- To have custody, control, or possession of any such fin aboard a fishing vessel unless it is naturally attached to the corresponding carcass;
- To transfer any such fin from one vessel to another vessel at sea, or to receive any such fin in such transfer, without the fin naturally attached to the corresponding carcass; or

¹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), *2017 Shark Finning Report to Congress*, available at <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/19769> (last visited Jan. 7, 2019) (herein "NOAA Report").

² Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, *Sharking Finning: Sharks Turned Prey*, available at <https://ocean.si.edu/ocean-news/shark-finning-sharks-turned-prey> (last visited Jan. 7, 2019).

³ BBC News, *Canada becomes the first G20 country to ban shark fin trade*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-48714320> (June 21, 2019).

⁴ The Guardian, *Sharks at risk of extinction from overfishing, say scientists*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/mar/02/sharks-risk-extinction-overfishing-scientists> (Mar. 2, 2013).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ NOAA Report at 3.

⁸ NOAA, *Shark Conservation Act*, available at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/laws-and-policies/shark-conservation-act> (last visited Jan. 7, 2019).

- To land any such fin that is not naturally attached to the corresponding carcass, or to land any shark carcass without such fins naturally attached.⁹

A person who violates these federal laws may be subject to a civil penalty of up to \$100,000 for each violation, as determined by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.¹⁰

Import, Export and Sale of Shark Fins

While the practice of shark finning is prohibited in the U.S., the trade of shark fins is legal. Between 2012 and 2016, the U.S. imported an average of 49 tons of shark fins and exported an average of 25 tons of shark fins per year.¹¹ A number of countries from which the U.S. imports shark fins do not have a shark finning ban in place, such as China, Indonesia, and Japan. In response, 12 states have banned the trade of shark fins: California, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington.¹²

Shark fins may still be legally bought and sold in Florida. Despite fishing restrictions, and the ban on finning in Florida, Florida remains a leader in the U.S. of the importation of shark fins. News reports indicate that:

“Since 2015, Miami has led the nation in the number of shark fins imported from Hong Kong, likely caused by an increasing number of import bans in other states. According to a review by the nonprofit Oceana, the number of fins arriving at PortMiami from Hong Kong, the historic center of the fin trade, was dwindling between 2010 and 2014. But after California and New York banned imports in 2011 and 2013, fin shipments began rising.”¹³

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The Florida Constitution authorizes the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to enact rules and regulations regarding the state's fish and wildlife resources.¹⁴ Florida residents and visitors must have a freshwater fishing or saltwater fishing license from FWC if they attempt to take or assist in a take of fish or marine organisms,¹⁵ unless they are under the age of 16, are over the age of 65, or meet another licensure exemption.¹⁶

Shark Fishing Regulations in Florida

In Florida, a fisherman may only catch one shark per day, and each vessel is limited to two sharks per day, even if more than two fishermen are on board.¹⁷ Sharks may only be caught by hook and line gear¹⁸ and may not be caught by using multiple hooks with live or dead natural bait or by snagging.¹⁹

⁹ 16 U.S.C. § 1857(1)(P), (2015).

¹⁰ 16 U.S.C. § 1858 (1996).

¹¹ NOAA Report at 23-24.

¹² See CAL. FISH & GAME CODE § 2021; DEL. CODE ANN. tit. 7 § 928A; HAW. REV. STAT. § 188-40.7; 515 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/5-30; MD. CODE ANN. NAT. RES. § 4-747; MASS. GEN. LAWS ANN. ch. 130, § 106; NEV. REV. STAT. § 597.2-3; N.Y. ENVTL. CONSERV. LAW § 13-0338; OR. REV. STAT. § 509.160; R.I. GEN. LAWS § 20-1-29; TEX. PARKS & WILD. CODE § 66.2161; WASH. REV. CODE § 77.15.770.

¹³ Jenny Staletovich, The Miami Herald, Miami now nation's top importer of shark fins. Many states have banned the product, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/environment/article210157954.html> (May 2, 2018).

¹⁴ Art. IV, s. 9, FLA. CONST.

¹⁵ Section 379.352, F.S.

¹⁶ Section 379.353, F.S.

¹⁷ Rule 68B-44.004(1)-(2), F.A.C.

¹⁸ Rule 68B-44.006(1), F.A.C.

¹⁹ Rule 68B-44.006(2), F.A.C.

Fishermen must land all sharks harvested in Florida waters²⁰ in a whole condition.²¹ A marine organism is “landed” when the animal is harvested and physically brought ashore. Individuals may not possess a shark that has had the head removed; been divided, filleted, ground, skinned, or finned;²² or had the caudal fin (tail) removed, while in or on the waters of the state, on any public or private fishing pier, or on a bridge or catwalk attached to a bridge from which fishing is allowed. Fishermen may eviscerate or gut the shark or slice the base of the caudal fin to bleed the carcass as long as the caudal fin remains attached before landing.²³

Florida law imposes restrictions on harvesting sharks based on the species and size of the shark. The following sharks have no minimum size limit for harvest in Florida waters: Atlantic sharpnose shark; blacknose shark; blacktip shark; bonnethead; finetooth shark; and all species of dogfish and smoothhounds within the Genus *mustelus*.²⁴ The following sharks must be at least 54 inches long to harvest in Florida waters: bull shark; nurse shark; spinner shark; blue shark; oceanic whitetip shark; porbeagle; shortfin mako shark; and thresher shark.²⁵ No person may harvest the following sharks in Florida waters: Atlantic angel shark; basking shark; bigeye sand tiger; bigeye sixgill shark; bigeye thresher; bignose shark; bluntnose sixgill shark; Caribbean reef shark; Caribbean sharpnose shark; dusky shark; Galapagos shark; great hammerhead; lemon shark; longfin mako; narrowtooth shark; night shark; sandbar shark; sand tiger; scalloped hammerhead; sharpnose sevengill shark; silky shark; smalltail shark; smooth hammerhead; spiny dogfish; tiger shark; whale shark; white shark.²⁶

While fishermen may not harvest, possess, land, purchase, sell, or exchange these species of shark, including any part of these species, in state waters, the prohibition does not apply to sharks harvested lawfully in federal waters when the shark is transported directly through state waters with fishing gear appropriately stowed.²⁷

Florida law prohibits the possession of a shark fin separated from the shark in Florida waters unless such possession is authorized by FWC or the fin was legally obtained on land, was prepared by taxidermy, and is possessed for the purposes of display.²⁸ An individual who violates this prohibition is subject to the following penalties:

Violations	Type of Criminal Infraction	Civil Penalty and	Violations	Type of Criminal Infraction
Jail Time	License Restrictions	Administrative Fines	Jail Time	License Restrictions
1st offense	2nd Degree Misdemeanor	Max. \$500	1st offense	2nd Degree Misdemeanor
Max. 60 days	Suspension of license for six months	\$4,500	Max. 60 days	Suspension of license for six months
2nd offense	2nd Degree Misdemeanor	Max. \$500	2nd offense	2nd Degree Misdemeanor

²⁰ Florida’s seaward boundary extends nine nautical miles in the Gulf of Mexico and three nautical miles in the Atlantic Ocean. Art. II, s. 1, FLA. CONST.

²¹ Rule 68B-44.003(2), F.A.C.

²² The term “finned” means one or more fins, including the caudal fin (tail), are no longer naturally attached to the body of the shark. Rule 68B-44.002(1), F.A.C.

²³ Rule 68B-44.003(2), F.A.C.

²⁴ Rule 68B-44.003(1), F.A.C.; FWC, *Sharks*, <http://myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/sharks/> (last visited Jan. 7, 2019).

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ Rule 68B-44.004(3), F.A.C.

²⁷ Rule 68B-44.003(4), F.A.C.

²⁸ Section 379.2426(2), F.S.

Effect of the Bill

The bill prohibits the import, export, and sale of shark fins. An individual who violates this prohibition is subject to the penalties outlined in the table above.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Amends s. 379.2426, F.S., relating to the possession, import, export, and sale of shark fins.

Section 2. Provides an effective date of October 1, 2020.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

See Fiscal Comments.

2. Expenditures:

See Fiscal Comments.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

The bill may have a negative fiscal impact on commercial harvesters and wholesale dealers because they would no longer be able to buy and sell shark fins.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The bill may have an indeterminate:

- Positive fiscal impact on the state by creating a penalty for the import, export, and sale of shark fins; and
- Negative fiscal impact related to jail bed impacts.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable. This bill does not appear to require counties or municipalities to spend funds or take action requiring the expenditure of funds; reduce the authority that counties or municipalities have to raise revenues in the aggregate; or reduce the percentage of state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

The bill does not authorize or require rulemaking.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

None.