

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

November 6, 2019

Mr. Chris Oliver
Assistant Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
1315 East-West Highway, 14th Floor
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Ms. Margaret Everson
Principal Deputy Director Exercising the
Authority of the Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Dear Mr. Oliver and Ms. Everson,

I am concerned species of sharks listed under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) are being exported from the United States without the appropriate export permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The purpose of CITES is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival, so it is important that the United States has the appropriate implementation mechanisms in place to protect species.

Currently, there are 14 shark species listed under CITES Appendix II. Of these, only four are illegal to catch in the United States: the whale shark, basking shark, great white shark, and thresher sharks.¹ The remaining CITES Appendix II-listed species² can legally be landed in the United States and exported out of the United States if the exporter obtains a CITES export permit from FWS. In order to obtain an export permit, FWS must determine the export is not detrimental to the survival of the species, and the specimen was acquired legally.³

NOAA databases show CITES-listed species are actively being fished in the United States and sharks are being exported overseas, although NOAA's export database does not include species-specific data, so it is impossible to determine what species are being exported. Nearly 3 million kilograms of shark meat and fins worth over \$11 million were exported out of the United States in 2018.⁴ However, according to FWS, there was not a single export permit granted for any species

¹ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/educational-materials/prohibited-shark-identification-placard>: The silky shark is allowed to be retained only in bottom longline and gillnet fisheries.

² Carcharhinidae requiem sharks (2 spp.); Sphyrnidae hammerhead sharks (3 spp.); Lamnidae mackerel sharks (2 spp.); and Myliobatidae eagle and mobulid rays (2 spp.)

³ U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: CITES Permits and Certificates Fact Sheet.
<https://www.fws.gov/international/pdf/factsheet-cites-permits-and-certificates-2013.pdf>

⁴ NOAA Office of Science and Technology, National Marine Fisheries Service. Commercial Fisheries Statistics: Annual Trade Data by Product through All U.S. Customs Districts. <https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/foreign-trade/applications/annual-trade-through-all-us-customs-districts>

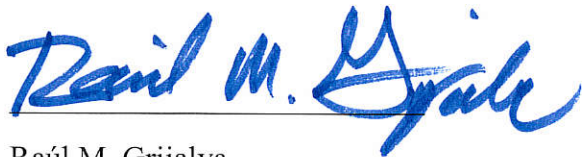
of shark in 2018.⁵ With 3 million kilograms of shark products exported during 2018, it seems improbable that there were *zero* exports of Appendix II-listed shark species.

The lack of oversight in CITES export permit management could be detrimental to listed shark populations and counter to the intent of CITES. In order to address our concerns regarding the management of CITES-listed shark species, please respond to the following questions:

- 1) Do NOAA and FWS believe that no CITES Appendix II species were exported in 2018?
- 2) How do NOAA and FWS coordinate to ensure that CITES-listed shark species are being permitted properly before exportation?
- 3) How are shark exports inspected?
- 4) Have NOAA and FWS observed any cases of an exporter exporting a CITES-listed species without a permit?
- 5) If NOAA used species-specific export data, would it help ensure that the proper permits were acquired?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We ask for a response to this inquiry by November 20, 2019. Data is fundamental to our understanding of threatened shark populations. Without proper information about shark exports, we are blind as to how the United States is contributing to the global problem of overfishing sharks. Should you have any questions regarding our requests, please reach out to Lora Snyder on the House Natural Resources Committee at 202-225-6065.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources



Jared Huffman
Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and
Wildlife



Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Gregorio Sablan
Member of Congress

⁵ CITES Trade Database. https://trade.cites.org/en/cites_trade/