

The Fiji Times
Letters to the Editor
March 23, 2012 – May 22, 2012

Tuesday May 22, 2012

Shark legislation

I AM proud to support the designation of a shark sanctuary in Fiji. The legal protection offered to sharks in the pending decree will help ensure a healthy marine ecosystem and give divers like me a powerful incentive to travel to your beautiful country. Please move this important decree forward, and reinforce Fiji's reputation as a world-class diving destination.

BRIAN ROBBINS
New York
USA

Stop the nonsense

I AM a Class Eight student at Pacific Harbour Multi-Cultural School and am writing to The Fiji Times because I'm upset and concerned about Fiji sharks. I have been reading this newspaper and feel really sad that sharks continue to be killed. Our sharks are important to the marine life but up to 76 million sharks are killed each year. We are trying hard to win over the government to stop this shark finning nonsense and save our Fiji sharks from extinction. I hope people reading this will change their minds about sharks.

NATALIE SIMPSON
Pacific Harbour

Endangered species

SHARKS are an endangered species because people are now killing them without a thought for their fins, from which shark fin soup is made. People get a lot of money from this but don't realise how very important sharks are. Sharks are beautiful creatures and very important to marine life. All the children in my school, Pacific Harbour Multi-Cultural School, where I am in Class Seven, are very concerned about shark finning. Our school is trying very hard to help stop shark finning in Fiji and around the world and I hope people in Fiji can help us.

ETHAN VAILASI
Pacific Harbour

End finning

I AM against shark finning that is still allowed in Fiji. I am in Class Seven and a prefect at Pacific Harbour Multi-Cultural School and I want my children and my grandchildren to be able to see sharks when they are my age. If people are killing sharks in huge numbers, there will be none of them left very soon. About 26 to 73 million sharks are killed each year. Please, stop shark finning.

MANON HUFFER BOIVERT
Pacific Harbour

Don't kill them

WE, the students of Pacific Harbour Multi-Cultural School, are very upset that people in Fiji are still killing sharks. As a Class Six student, I've been taught that sharks are on top of the food chain and play a big part in tourism. Please, help us show people that children, parents and teachers today care a lot about sharks. We should not kill them.

SIMRAN SANDHYA SINGH

Pacific Harbour

Monday, May 21, 2012

Preserve our sharks

IN regards to sharks, we need them because, like all other species of marine life, they play a big part and the most important. All sharks have their own areas of living, or where they move in, and around. Those that go diving will know more about sharks and what beautiful creatures they are, even though dangerous. They will not harm you unless provoked. Sharks don't eat humans, they bite them out of provocation or mistaken identity. We really need to preserve our sharks.

Sa kua mada na fin soup.

RICHARD ABEL

Suva

Magnificent creatures

AS headboy of Pacific Harbour Multi-Cultural School, I, my fellow students and teachers are concerned and upset about shark finning in Fiji. Sharks are the most sacred and magnificent creatures in the world. About 26 to 73 million sharks have been killed per year and only four to five people die from shark attacks per year. It seems like sharks are getting killed more than humans every year. People have been killing sharks in huge amounts and soon there will not be any more sharks left. Sharks have lived on this Earth for centuries. We must help these sharks for they are at the top of the food chain. If the sharks are extinct, the food chain will be destroyed. As a Fijian, sharks are sacred in our culture and they have lived in our waters for years. We, the people, of Fiji, should be looking after our sharks but instead are destroying or killing them. People are getting a lot of money from this while the species are starting or already becoming extinct. The citizens of Fiji should by now realise how important it is to preserve the sharks.

KASA SAUBULINAYAU

Pacific Harbour

Help us save them

I AM a Class Five student of Pacific Harbour Multi-Cultural School and am very angry with the people who are killing our sharks. We have to save the sharks because they keep the food chain balanced. If people are killing the sharks, the food chain will be unbalanced. Please, help us help people understand just how important it is to save the sharks.

RITIK ALI

Pacific Harbour

Fin soup

SHARKS are sacred to us Fijians and have lived in our waters for centuries. We, the people of Fiji, should look after our sharks and keep them from harm but instead are allowing foreigners to come and kill our sharks for their fins only. Not only foreigners, natives too kill sharks for a great amount of money. My school, Pacific Harbour Multi-Cultural School, at which I am headgirl, is trying hard to stop the killing of sharks for shark fin soup. I hope the citizens of Fiji realise what we are doing to our native sharks and wake up.

CHRISTINA NAUGAVULE

Pacific Harbour

Tuesday, May 15, 2012

Disappearing species

RECENTLY a lot of letters and awareness about saving sharks have been brought to light. Not only the shark is threatened with extinction but a host of other species, I know, are doomed. I am talking with a lot of experience in my field and my expertise is the lagoon, sea and mangroves. I haven't seen some species in 20 years. My family and I found a lot of turtle hatchlings, nursed them and returned them later. I am ashamed to say that spending so much time in the forests, I never ever saw a coconut crab. I also have never seen a kavu fish, even though I was a full-time subsistence fisher spearman in Fiji. I put the blame squarely on gill netters. They have stripped-mined the ocean. What's so disturbing here is what took an eon to change evolution changed in a quarter of a human lifetime.

SUSEN SAKAL

Hayward

USA

Monday, May 14, 2012

Incomplete statements

An incomplete statement can be incorrect. I have noticed "money is the root of all evil" and mention of sharks as "the top predator", though some people correctly say "a top predator". Like "nothing can go faster than light", these incomplete statements are wrong. It is the love of money that is the root of all evil. Just ask a handicapped widow with small children what could be evil about money. Sharks are not "the" top predator they are being driven to extinction by a higher and more relentless one.

PETER RODDA

Lami

Saturday, May 12, 2012

Example for the world

We are a shark conservation group that is based Australia who are pleased to say are friends with Fiji shark defenders. We support the work undertaken by this fine group of individuals in your country. We strongly support them in their call for greater protection for sharks in Fiji waters. Please set the example for the rest of the world in shark and ocean conservation my friends.

All the very best to your efforts.

MICK DOWERS

Australia

Friday, May 11, 2012

Shark support

Dive Tropex Tokoriki is writing this letter to add our support to the Fiji Shark Sanctuary Campaign with the move to create a shark sanctuary in Fiji's EEZ (exclusive economic zone). We strongly support this for the following reasons:

- * Economically shark finning brings little monetary gain to Fiji whereas shark-related tourism adds many millions of dollars annually;
- * Shark finning is entirely unsustainable and the removal of an apex predator has a proven negative effect on the health of the marine ecosystem. This has both an ecological and economic impacts;
- * Sharks have great symbolic importance to indigenous Fijians; and
- * The successful implementation of a shark sanctuary, if disseminated correctly, will bring huge positive worldwide publicity to Fiji.

We very much hope that The Fiji Times can lend its weight to this wonderful cause.

WILL and ALEX

Tokoriki PADI 5 Star Dive Centre

Wednesday, May 9, 2012

Save the sharks, save our oceans

LET there be no misunderstanding. We fear sharks. We fear them very much. In fact, our second thought when setting foot in the sea is usually -SHARKS! But our first thought is to admire the beauty of ocean, of the diversity of living creatures that call it their home. And what we fear more than the shark is loss of this diversity, the destruction of this majestic beauty. That is why we are writing this letter. To let you know that despite our fear (which we blame entirely on "JAWS") we understand what the movie did not tell us. We need the shark. We understand that this world, living and non-living, exists in a fragile balance. Sharks of all species play a vital role in such a balance. We understand that if sharks were to disappear, the ocean would lose its king. Without the shark, smaller fish populations will grow far too large. They in turn would deplete their prey-crustaceans and molluscs. Without these to feed on algae, our seas would be covered by algal blooms; life in the oceans would suffocate. We need to save the shark for our ecosystem. We understand that if sharks were to disappear, our people would lose a part of their identity. We need to save the shark for our culture. We fear the shark alright, but that is only one side of the tale. Do not let the terrified screams drown out the voices that tell you the other

side-that sharks can also be respected. They are living proof of how truly magnificent nature can be. Sharks may not have a voice, but we do. And we say in no uncertain terms, that we believe in the shark. We believe in their survival. Do not let our voice go unheard. Save the sharks!

AFRETE ETIKA NIKITA RAO

Suva

Our children's survival

IS it possible to save the already, severely, depleted shark populations, in Fiji's ocean? Who knows? "But try we must." No sharks means no tuna. No mangroves means no breeding grounds for many fish and other marine species. The whole fisheries collapses. Possibly within this decade. Who is willing to take the chance? Who is willing to place a gun to our children's heads, with one or two bullets in the revolving chamber and pull the trigger? The government has a 'duty of care' to put in place a moratorium on all of the above immediately - this week.

The government should, I suggest, place an immediate ban on the export of shark fins - this week, next week may be too late. This is too important to wait until the healthy, public debate runs its course. Moratoriums' can be modified and or lifted, lost species are lost forever, along with the allied eco systems which crash in sympathy. Get with the program, leaders, our children and grandchildren are watching.

PETER RAE

Korotogo Planet Earth

Monday, May 7, 2012

Save the sharks

THERE has been a lot of interest from people all over the world in the country's shark sanctuary project. As Allen rightly said, we should not forget about the people as well. How about setting an online shark conservation fund probably at the relevant ministry's website. How about a banner appearing on The Fiji Times online site that leads to the ministry's website and interested persons could contribute through PAYPAL (for example). And of course all these should be transparent so when Damu, Kawakawa and Ogo click on these websites, a real-time counter should appear telling them of the current balance and a statement indicating how much and where the monies have been used. Accountability, this is what people want to see to contribute. It may be worth the effort for we never know unless it is tried.

RAKESH CHAND

Sydney

Saturday, May 5, 2012

Booking agency

I'm writing to you regarding the protection of sharks. Sharks are not only a crucial element of the marine ecosystem, but also a vital part of tourism. I'm a co-owner of a shark-diving booking agency that makes bookings for shark tourists worldwide and can tell you first-hand of the value these sharks present to the economies around the world. Because of their really slow reproduction rates, sharks are not suited to commercial fishing. Nature designed them to be a top predator with few natural enemies and never intended them to be hunted on a large scale by humans. I urge you to let your government know, that people around the world are hoping that

Fiji will protect their sharks and they can't wait to travel to your beautiful country to see those sharks and spend some money to support your local economy.

MARTIN GRAF

San Marcos

CA

Vital resource

I am writing you at the request of Friends of Sharks to tell you how important it is to support the creation of a shark sanctuary in Fiji. Sharks are so important to a healthy ocean and Fiji has special reason to protect them. As a diver, seeing sharks on a healthy reef was my primary reason for visiting Fiji. And as a scuba instructor, sharks are the primary reason I send divers I train to Fiji. With so many native species and a healthy dive culture, Fiji should lead the way in shark conservation and seek to protect this vital resource. I hope you will add my voice to the support of the sanctuary, and hope that I hear of its successful creation in the near future.

JESSICA BLEAK

USA

Protect sharks

As the oldest living vertebrates, sharks provide information on the origin and evolution of all vertebrate species. They have the greatest electrical sensitivity and are the filter feeders thus prevent harmful algal blooms. They grow economies through their attraction and also clean our ocean as many sharks are scavengers. Because of their fins' delicacy and the selfishness of humans their number is decreasing day by day. Sharks shape our economy so it's surprising that they are on the verge of extinction. Wake up people and take the necessary course of action before it's too late both for us and the sharks.

SHIKHA KAPOOR

Nasinu

Friday, May 4, 2012

Shark sanctuary

AS a marine conservationist and underwater photographer, I'm a frequent visitor to Fiji's incredible reefs, including its population of sharks which are increasingly hard to find elsewhere. I urge Fiji to join the growing movement that aims to stop the unsustainable slaughter of sharks by establishing a national shark sanctuary for their lasting preservation. The world's sharks are rapidly vanishing, with two-thirds of Fiji's shark species being globally threatened with the risk of extinction (as evaluated by the International Union for Conservation of Nature). This continuing massacre is mostly generated by the demand to have their fins used as an ingredient in shark fin soup, frequently served at weddings and banquets. The sharks targeted by shark finners aren't taken whole. Their valuable fins (which can fetch up to \$US700 a kilo) are sliced off and the less valuable mutilated shark is tossed back into the sea to slowly die. The obliteration of over 400 million years of evolution for some perceived social status with serving shark fin soup isn't just incredibly wasteful and cruel it's tragic. Many shark species are apex predators and are necessary to regulate species abundance and the distribution essential in maintaining an intricate ecosystem teeming with life-giving diversity. The removal of shark populations is causing substantial damage to the marine food chain, seagrass beds, and coral

reefs. Any cultural tradition that enables both species extinction and ecological havoc must surely be seen as an irrational and destructive practice. Conversely, a noble tradition that marks humankind's progress is assuming responsibility for all generation, ensuring that the world left to the next generation is at least as vital and habitable as the one we live in today. Finite resources and natural processes simply can't be compromised and the ecological and economic consequence of an ocean without sharks is devastating. Grotesque greed and indifference must be denied for the sake of the sharks and for a planet that requires their continuing existence. The creation of a national shark sanctuary for Fiji's waters would be a bold statement that the people of Fiji have reached a threshold - their own tipping point that says "enough" to the senseless slaughter of the world's sharks.

EDWARD DORSONm

New York

USA

Top predators

I just wanted to take a moment to express how important sharks are to our oceans. As top predators, their populations have direct effects on the rest of the marine food web. Protecting sharks and other top predators helps preserve the integrity of our ocean's health and fisheries. Tens of millions of sharks are killed each year by humans for shark fin soup, or as bycatch by fisheries. Furthermore, research has shown ecotourism can be a great source of income for many nations. Sharks have a higher intrinsic, non-consumptive value than they do for a one-time consumptive use. Hence, sharks are far more valuable alive than dead. Not only because they can generate more money through tourism related activities, but also because of the value they have in keeping the oceans in check. We need a Fiji shark sanctuary! We must protect them in areas where they are vulnerable and known to historically inhabit. Palau established the first and many other nations have already followed suit. This is an opportunity to promote conservation and education, as well as bring in money through tourism. I love sharks. I have been diving in Palau recently, and I would come to Fiji if I knew that Fiji had implemented a shark sanctuary!

JENNAH CASTER

University of Southern California

Help sharks

Ever since I was very young I had a deep love, fascination and concern for sharks. Please help maintain and save the shark population which is vital for the ecosystem.

STAMATIS POULIMENOS

Greece

Thursday, May 3, 2012

Mistaken belief

Many people mistakenly believe sharks are somehow bad or dangerous. They are key top-down controllers of healthy ecosystems, and we have a better chance of winning the lottery (1 in 175 million) than we do of being killed by a shark (1 in 264 million). In fact, sharks have a great deal more to fear from us. Over 70 million are killed every year, mostly for their fins, and many populations have declined over 90 per cent in the last few decades. Whatever the cause of their decline, it's clear sharks need our help if they are to remain a symbol of the power and purity of

life in the oceans and continue to fulfil their critical ecological roles. As an oceanic nation, Fiji has a fantastic opportunity to do more for shark conservation than most nations by declaring a shark sanctuary in its waters. The eyes of the global conservation community are on Fiji as we watch with anticipation the outcomes of the public consultation session regarding this proposal. My sincere hope is that Fiji embraces a leadership role to show the rest of the world an example of how we can protect and live alongside sharks. Vinaka vakelevu.

DR ALISTAIR DOVE

Atlanta

Ecosystem essentials

Please assure sharks around Fiji are protected. They are essential to the ecosystem.

For the economy, it is important to have marine reserves and safeguard the beautiful ocean environment we tourists love. Many of my friends and family and myself want to visit Fiji and one important reason is the marine life and sharks. Thank you for helping protect marine life and the beautiful shark.

MARIANI VERMEEND

Australia

Sharks alive

I do not live in Fiji, I live in Florida, USA and I am a professional scuba diver working in the dive industry. I book trips to take divers all around the world and the number one thing people want to see under water are sharks, live sharks. I want to run trips to Fiji to come see the sharks of Fiji so please consider helping protect sharks, especially the sharks of Fiji. Thank you for your time.

Nikole Ordway

USA

Next holiday

I have never been to Fiji for a holiday, and truthfully I wasn't quite sure what is it that set Fiji apart from many other tourist destinations in the tropics. However upon hearing the plans for a Fijian shark sanctuary, I know exactly where my next holiday will be! It is so crucial that we act now to help save sharks. They are one of the ocean's apex predators, they control much of the ecosystem in the ocean, and if sharks are wiped out the consequences would be disastrous.

Having sanctuaries for sharks is a wonderful way to help protect these brilliant animals.

I cannot wait to come to the Fiji shark sanctuary.

DANICA DALEY

Melbourne

Australia

Important protection

I am writing to you to express my sincere concerns and unwavering support for shark protections because sharks are not only magnificent creatures that are on the brink of extinction because of mankind's selfish and greedy actions, but they are undoubtedly an important part of the ecosystems that are vital to our survival as human beings and the survival of our beautiful oceans. I am a scuba diver and marine enthusiast and I travel only to countries that protect

sharks so please visiting Fiji would be on my next list if shark protections are in place. Please, I beg of you consider how important shark protections are.

JUSTINE SCHULTES

Toronto

CANADA

Reason for couple's trip

I am writing to support the idea of establishing a shark sanctuary in Fiji waters. I am a diver who lives in Hawaii, but I travel quite a bit. My husband and I have been to Fiji more than once. We enjoyed your reefs and marine animals, but would be more likely to return if the sharks were protected and more plentiful. This year we travelled to Palau to see the sharks in their sanctuary. It was a wonderful experience. We are also going to the Bahamas this year, again, the reason for the trip is to see sharks. I am confident that we are just two among thousands of divers and travellers who look for places to see these magnificent underwater creatures. Fiji should be one of these places. The value of a shark, over its lifetime, is far greater as a "tourist attraction" than the life-ending value of its fin for soup. Please consider the environment and your long-term economy when you are in the process of making this very important decision.

JAMIE PARDAU

Kailua Kona

Hawaii

Tuesday, May 1, 2012

Save sharks

I am writing to you today and asking you to help us plead with the Fiji government to save our priceless sharks by banning all shark finning and shark fishing. Sharks take part in a major role in keeping our ocean life in balance. Without sharks, the quality and diversity of marine life will be negatively affected, destroying our oceans. Every month in Fiji, over 26,000 sharks are killed for their fins. This is appalling and needs to come to an end. Scientists have also shown that eating shark fins damages our nervous system and causes cancer. Sharks have been living on this planet since before the dinosaurs, yet we are destroying their population at an alarming rate with each passing year. I cannot urge you and your team enough to help Fiji save its sharks by supporting a shark sanctuary for all of Fiji. Help us demand that the government pass laws to protect sharks before it's too late. Thanks for your time and much needed support!

KRISTEN DAVID

Ra

Saturday, April 28, 2012

Role of a species

Mr Sukha Singh's letter reveals something which needs to be looked at if we are seriously serious (so to speak) about protecting sharks or any plant and animal species for this matter. We need to understand that each species of life plays as equally important a role as another for a smooth running ecosystem. They are all an essential part of nature. We cannot expect to take away the food of one species and also expect them to continue to flourish. It does not work this way. If we really want to preserve nature, then first and foremost, we need to stick to our

natural diet just like all other life forms do. Someone rightly said in this column, although, it is not a "may be" but a fact that we have overstepped the boundary of law and order that makes creation function naturally as it was intended to.

Shalina Sharma
Lautoka

Thursday, April 26, 2012

Ocean nut

My name is Marcie, I live in Alberta Canada. Our idea of nature is much different than it is in Fiji, and although I love my homeland, it is the marine wildlife of your land that calls to me. I am an ocean nut. Today my plea to you is to protect one of the most essential creatures in your marine habitat. You need sharks in your water to sustain a healthy ecosystem. Please protect the sharks because I would love to come and visit them. I really feel that no one cares about the sharks because they aren't cute and cuddly, and although I am nowhere near them I feel a need to speak out for them. Please protect them before it's too late.

MARCIE PRINGLE
Alberta
Canada

Shark haven

There were lot of sharks in the Waikava Bay and the Fawn Harbour in Vanua Levu in the sixties. You could see them even in the shallows. I have heard stories that Dakuwaqa, the shark god, has his resting place in the Waikava River. As far as I know no one has killed sharks in this area. There are hardly any sharks left in these two bays after extensive use of nets in these areas. The decline in shark numbers can also be because of the general decline in fish stocks .

SUKHA SINGH
Pittsfield
USA

First time

I will be going to Fiji for the first time in September. I, like many others going to Fiji, will be diving and very much hope to see the sharks. I think protection though, is important for another reason. Working with many low and middle-income countries, I see the value of tourism and the need to bring economic development to people of the country. A healthy ecosystem can set the island apart. This is not only important for attracting tourists, but can attract research and become a source of pride for the population. I hope the government of Fiji will put protections in place to preserve the uniqueness of your very beautiful part of the world.

LOIS PRIVOR-DUMM
West Chester
PA
USA

Right decision

I found your mail address posted by Shark Savers and several other conservation groups. I understand that some crucial political decisions for the protection of Fiji's sharks may be ahead. I

hope with all my heart that your government will make the right decision and protect these beautiful and endangered creatures in the territorial waters of Fiji. There are only few places with halfway healthy shark populations left in the world where I could hope to travel to encounter these favourite fishes of mine. I'm scared to ever have to witness a shark being ruthlessly killed instead, which would traumatise me for life - having seen many horrible pictures shown by the conservation groups has been unbearable already. So I hope you will help me speak out for the protection of Fiji's sharks so that I, and certainly many other diving tourists, can come to visit your beautiful island and see your amazing sharks alive and well. Thank you in advance for your support.

DIANA NYMAND
Germany

Second visit

We are from Hawaii, and are visiting Fiji for our second time this September. We are very excited about the the creation of your shark sanctuary. Thank you for protecting the sharks and coral reefs. Aloha.

Douglas And Dionne Miller
Hawaii

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

Shark sanctuary

I support the proposed shark sanctuary in Fiji for a number of reasons. I live in Mallorca, Spain and there are very few sharks left here. I am a diver and would like to go diving with sharks, in the future, Fiji would be the first place I would choose to visit. Fiji is a pioneering country within the conservation world and I think if your government announces the shark sanctuary, this will set the standard for the rest of the world. Last of all, it is the right thing to do.

Brad Robertson
Spain

Tuesday, April 24, 2012

Shark vote

As a fellow pacific islander living in South Florida, I was so proud and happy of my people voting to protect our local sharks of the Northern Mariana Islands, especially during these really tough times. As you know, sharks are being killed by the millions on an annual basis and conservation experts have stated that at this rate our grandchildren will not have the opportunity to enjoy their presence in the oceans and our marine ecosystem. They play their part in the sea and we ours on the land. Let them have the chance to replenish, so that we don't destroy our seas for our future generations. Pacific Islanders realise the importance our fellow sea creatures play in the way this world runs. Because of our island roots, we have a deeper connection to our oceans. A strong ocean signifies a strong beating heart and spirit of our native people. Help maintain the peace of our seas and protect the sharks in our oceans from the irreversible impact of overfishing and exploitation. On behalf of Fijian sharks and sharks all over the world.

CD FERNANDEZ

Esq.

Northern Marianas native

Shark visit

Sharks are important to the environment, economy, and culture. I pledge to support policies and initiatives that protect shark species in Fiji and throughout the South Pacific. I can't wait to come visit Fiji sharks and just hope when the time will come there still will be some of them alive.

VALERIE BUISSON

France

Citizen of the world

As a citizen of the world, I urge you to please support shark protection in Fiji. Sharks are a very important part of the ecosystem and essential to the health of the world's oceans. Plus, one of the main reasons I scuba dive is to see sharks. If you protect your sharks, shark loving divers will spend money in Fiji! It is a win-win situation for everyone involved, and the world will know how smart folks in Fiji are!

ANN HAMMACK

Pittsboro

NC

USA

Dive destination

I have heard through the bubbles that your government is close to making a decision on shark protection in your waters. I strongly support any positive decision. Fiji is on the top of my list as a destination to dive with sharks, I have a video clip from a friend that was taken at Beqa and I watch it often. The world is starting to wake up to the fact that we need sharks, an ocean with sharks is a healthy ocean. Please don't let the only sharks I see in Fiji be the ones that I watch in the video.

Gina Mascord

Australia

Saturday, April 21, 2012

Boost to tourism

Yesterday's front page news on shark diving operation is a great tip to further boost our tourism growth. Thank you The Fiji Times. I would suggest Tavua Bay leading towards Yasawa as a future development zone that investors should focus on.

Joe Smith

Deuba

Friday, April 20, 2012

Protect Our Sharks

AS the battle to protect the shark intensifies, it is good to note that diving to see, touch or simply experience the aura of these predators of the sea is aiding the local economy. Shark-related dives

contributed \$75million to our economy in 2010, a survey revealed. The study by the Australian Institute of Marine Science and the University of Western Australia discovered that shark diving was gaining popularity and is poised to become a tourism economic driver with conservation measures proposed to turn Fiji's waters into a shark sanctuary. While the industry contributed \$31.2m in government taxes, \$20.7m in corporate taxes and \$10.5m in direct taxes from shark divers, local communities received \$7.1m from shark diving operations. Spin-offs in terms of salaries paid out amounted to \$6.9m for workers and \$221,904 for traditional reef owners. The survey also discovered that sharks were among the most significant creatures tourists wish to see when scuba diving. There is no doubt about the fact that this survey is good news for the tourism industry. The revenue is a factor which should be encouraged and nurtured. Considering the shark fin trade and the millions it is supposed to earn, this revelation stands out as a positive feedback in the campaign to protect our sharks. Living sharks are good for the economy and it is imperative that every effort is made to ensure they are around well into the future.

It is encouraging to note that Fiji offers world-class shark dives. It is up to us though to accept our blessings and learn to appreciate our surroundings. What separates Fiji from the rest of the top shark dive spots around the world is the interesting fact that we offer divers the opportunity to be among eight different species of sharks in one location reef. Tourism among other things depends on the goodwill of the people of this country to flourish. We can make or break it. It is up to each one of us to do the right thing, for ourselves first and for our country. A Fiji shark sanctuary is not a bad idea. But there are sceptics who may insist consideration must be there for the people on the frontline - the men and women in the fishing industry and how any law protecting sharks could have an impact on them. Perhaps we need to consider the fact that up to 73 million sharks are killed each year for their fins, but this new report adds to the growing knowledge that they are worth much more alive than dead.

Fred Wesley, Editor
The Fiji Times

Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Save the sharks

According to Ronald Gatty (FT 21/03) attempts at the conservation of sharks is not a good idea and purposeless in its attempts to "preserve and protect every single biological species". How can you state that "we could do well without some species of shark"? Every creature is in its right place and the obvious absence of a link in the ecosystem chain will result in the weakening of the ecological structure. Due to human changes to our environment (terrestrial and aquatic) natural balance is disturbed as both are linked and as Sir Isaac Newton aptly states "every action has an equal and opposite reaction". There is a need to conserve sharks as they balance the marine ecosystem by being apex predators and removal of them would result in a cascade effect in the food chain and in extreme cases, possible local extinction of other fish species. In almost every Pacific Island country, including Fiji has some traditional link to sharks and it is a creature that has induced both fear and respect from our ancestors. Simply stating that they eat the same fish that we humans eat is a weak argument for their senseless removal from their habitat. I wish to thank The Fiji Times for their weekly (Monday issue) awareness on the importance of sharks both ecologically and economically and most importantly the need for awareness for shark conservation.

Vilame Waqalevu
Suva

Fascinating predator

Yoo hoo! Go Fiji go! Oh Mr Gatty I do hope you have also managed to read the absolutely gorgeous article 'Shark high-five' in last Friday's The Fiji Times. Humans are the only menace to nature and in numerous ways. The rest of nature merely works according to natural instinct. It is such a pleasure to read the letters and articles on the deeper understanding of sharks and all animals in general. Isn't it amazing how we all are so awed by the ocean's most fascinating predator - the great white. There is something about him - so graceful, so majestic, so beautiful, commands attention, makes you feel his authority and presence. Full of charisma this one. Who is not impressed, who does not admire them. We all do.

Shalina Sharma
Lautoka

Tuesday, March 27, 2012

We need sharks

Sharks are not only beautiful but they are an essential part of a healthy coral reef. Not only do they clean up diseased, dead or dying reef fish but they also eliminate the weaker fish on the reef. If the weaker fish on the reef survive, eventually the entire population will become weaker. By eliminating slow or weak individuals only the strong survive to breed and populate a healthy reef. They are the "doctors" of the reef. I was going to come from Canada to Pacific Harbour last year to dive with the sharks at Shark Reef but had to cancel. I hope to come this year. Sharks need us to protect them.

MURRAY ROGERS
Nanaimo BC
Canada

Healthy reefs

Two years ago my wife and I visited Fiji and had a wonderful time. One of the highlights of our visits was scuba diving in your beautiful, bountiful ocean with wonderful reefs expanding everywhere. They were so healthy compared to other places I have scuba dived. I don't get much of an opportunity to dive outside of California, but when I do, I try to choose a place that has variety of fish, reef structures and other forms of underwater life. I found that Fiji offered all of that and more. While I was there I had the pleasure of seeing many varieties of sharks, with some of the most impressive sharks I have seen in my 20 years of diving. I only hope that when I return that this will not change. In California our State legislature has recently passed a law to stop taking of shark's fins to help preserve our shark population in California. In all the diving in California, I have only seen six sharks. I saw that many in Fiji on one dive. I hope that Fiji will pass a law that will stop the practice of taking sharks' fins around Fiji. If this practice continues it will change the underwater ecosystem of Fiji. This in turn will affect the overall life in Fiji, even above the water. I have found that the people of Fiji are warm and friendly, with a deep compassion for their culture. I feel that most Fijians would want to stop the slaughter of thousands of shark each year just to use their fins in a soup. I can only hope that Fiji will pass a law that will ban the practice of taking sharks for the sole purpose of using their fins for soup.

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Shark extinction

LOOKS like Mr Ronald Gatty has a personal vendetta against the apex predators, sharks. He also has the scars to go along with his theory. Most survivors including Rodney Fox, whose guts were hanging out after a very gruesome attack in 1963, today are shark advocates and conservationists. Just about all victims will solemnly utter that they were at the wrong place at the wrong time, not the shark's fault but mine. Wow, the Crocodile Hunter must have turned in his grave by this news. I hope Mr Gatty's letter somehow reaches Rodney Fox and Valerie Taylor.

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