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Defense Date: Spring 2009

Title: Public Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior towards Sharks and Shark Conservation

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## ABSTRACT

Many species of shark are in danger of over-exploitation and could possibly be facing extinction. Sharks have been around for over 400 million years but recent declines that threaten their existence can be traced back to the current consumptive uses brought on by humans. If sharks are to be protected, legislation that better regulates their use must be developed. In order to create this legislation support will first be needed from the general public. Currently this could prove difficult because many individuals have negative preconceived notions about sharks, in many cases from the way they are portrayed in the media. It has been stated that the attitudes and behavior of the public have been shown to be able to cause changes in environmental policy. So the variables that can cause both positive attitudes and behaviors towards sharks are important if policies that support their conservation are to be put into place. Previous studies have found that a person's knowledge about a group of species can directly affect their attitude towards them. In this study it was discovered that knowledge could not only significantly predict a person's attitude but also their behavior towards the conservation of sharks. The higher a person's knowledge the more positive their attitude was and the more likely they were to behave in a way that would support conservation measures. However, it was also shown that in general respondents in the study had a low level of knowledge about sharks. Increasing knowledge about sharks is therefore very important if legislation protecting sharks is to be developed. This study showed that variables significantly affecting knowledge included a person's gender, where they received their information about sharks, whether or not they had viewed programs on "Shark Week" on the Discovery channel, if they were a member of an environmental group, and if they would fear an encounter with sharks. Understanding of how these variables can increase knowledge about sharks and subsequently produce more positive attitudes and behaviors could provide policy makers with the support needed to conserve sharks into the future.