

President Mike Sutton  
Members of the California Fish and Game Commission  
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Wädenswil, May 20, 2014

Dear President Sutton and Commissioners,

Sharks have been swimming in the world's oceans for more than 400 million years, since before the dinosaurs. While sharks have been able to survive periods of global mass extinctions, they have not evolved to withstand destructive human interactions. Great white shark populations are declining all around the globe.

The Pacific coast of California and Baja California, Mexico is home to a unique population of great white sharks that are genetically distinct and isolated from all other great white sharks around the globe. With only an estimated few hundred adult and sub-adult individual great white sharks remaining in this population, the survival of great white sharks on the U.S. west coast is at risk.

While there are some existing protections in place, juvenile great white sharks continue to be unintentionally caught as bycatch by U.S. and Mexican commercial fishing gillnets in important nursery areas for these young sharks. Under existing regulations, there are no limits on this bycatch, nor is there sufficient observer coverage in these fisheries. In addition juvenile great white sharks off of southern California have some of the highest levels of mercury, DDT, and PCBs found in any shark species worldwide.

Our ocean needs great white sharks. As top ocean predators, great white sharks play a critical top-down role in structuring the marine ecosystem by keeping prey populations like seals and sea lions in check. The presence of great white sharks ultimately increases species diversity of the overall ecosystem.

The west coast Pacific population of great white sharks requires additional protection as an endangered species because of its low population size and the ongoing threats from human activities. Endangered Species listing will be critical to effectively addressing the continued bycatch of great white sharks, while promoting additional scientific research on this population of grave concern. We urge you to protect great white sharks by listing the west coast population on the Endangered Species List.

Furthermore, we ask that you prioritize the implementation of new regulatory protections to minimize the bycatch mortality of white sharks in the Commission-managed set gillnet fishery that takes place in federal waters off Southern California, including consideration of time-area closures, increased observer coverage requirements, hard caps on bycatch, and limits on soak time of set gillnets. Action by California is an important component of a comprehensive effort that includes pressure on Mexico to address white shark bycatch in its fisheries.

Sincerely,



Sigrid Lueber  
OceanCAre President