



## **Enforcing shark sanctuary will take attitude shift, new rules**

By Online Editor

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A proposed Pacific shark sanctuary must overcome islanders' attitudes and commercial fishing boats that harvest large scale quantities of shark to become reality, a conservation leader said in Majuro.

Leaders in Micronesia area endorsed a plan late last month for a regional ban on the harvesting and sale of shark fins. The "shark sanctuary" would encompass ocean waters from Palau and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas in the west to the Marshall Islands in the east.

But current levels of shark fishing in the Marshall Islands and other islands is a hurdle that must be overcome for the leaders' shark fishing ban to work, said Marshall Islands Conservation Society Director Albon Ishoda.

It won't work to pass a law banning shark fishing unless it is accompanied by a massive community education campaign, Ishoda said. "If we just pass a law and tell them to follow it, (Marshall Islanders) won't live by it because they weren't part of it," he said.

Ishoda worked with the Marshall Islands Mayors Association to gain its endorsement last month for a shark fishing ban in the Marshall Islands, which follows on the heels earlier this year of the

Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority's temporary moratorium on largely unregulated shark fishing in the country.

To enforce a ban will require a change in attitudes by local residents and rewriting regulations that now allow shark fishing by longline tuna fishing boats. "Catching sharks is allowed as by-catch (for commercial fishermen)," Ishoda said. "The regulations allow up to 25 percent of the longliners' total catch to be sharks, but this level of shark fishing looks more like a targeted catch."

Marshall Islanders living on remote islands see shark fins, which they sell for about \$2 a pound, as a way to supplement their meager income. "No one really knows the level of shark fishing on the outer islands," Ishoda said. "It has the potential to get out of control because there is now no control on it."

In late July, the Presidents of Marshall Islands, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia, and the governors of the of Guam and the Northern Marianas called for establishing the world's first regional shark sanctuary by December 2012.

To give the leaders plan teeth, the Marshall Islands Conservation Society has drafted legislation that would ban both longliner tuna boats and local fishermen from engaging in the shark fin trade, Ishoda said.

Ishoda said the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority and its crew of observers who go out on fishing vessels to monitor tuna catches are the key to halting the widespread killing of sharks for their high-value fins, which are often sold for as much as \$70 a pound on the Asian market.

"We need to build the capacity of the observers and to ban certain types of fishing gear that targets sharks," he said.

"The problem is enforcement (of a future ban)," Ishoda said.

Ishoda said his organization is focusing on grassroots awareness campaigns to encourage local communities to understand the value of sharks to maintaining a healthy reef system. "The way we see it, sharks play an important role in the marine eco system," Ishoda said. "Without them, it will collapse." But, he said, many Marshall Islanders who depend on subsistence fishing for their livelihoods simply dislike sharks, he said. "They don't see the value of (living) sharks," he said.

"We need to do a lot of education on the ground," he said. Pointing to the recent adoption by outer island mayors of a resolution calling for a ban on shark fishing, Ishoda said: "Once people understand the issue better, they become advocates for a ban."

SOURCE: MARIANAS VARIETY/PACNEWS