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**Testimony Before the New Jersey Senate Economic Growth Committee  
In Support of S. 2057, A Bill to Prohibit the Sale of Shark Fin Products in New Jersey**

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Born Free USA, a national nonprofit animal advocacy and wildlife conservation organization, strongly supports Senator Lesniak and Senator Bateman's bill, S. 2057, to prohibit the sale of shark fins and the possession of any shark fin separated from a shark prior to its lawful landing. Shark finning is a cruel and wasteful practice which decimates shark populations and has a negative effect on ocean ecosystems. As the second largest shark fin market in the world after Asia, the United States bears a responsibility to act now.

**Current Circumstances of Shark Finning**

Shark finning is a brutal practice in which people cut the fins off live sharks and return their bodies to the water, where the sharks inevitably die. The animals who are cast back into the ocean suffer slow, painful deaths by drowning or blood loss.

Shark fins are most often used in shark fin soup, an Asian delicacy that has made the fins the most lucrative part of the animal. The fin itself is flavorless and adds nothing more than structure to the broth, but the expensive dish is a status symbol. The commercial value of fins has climbed to as much as \$300 per pound. Fins that are introduced through ports, such as those in New Jersey, are shipped to markets across the nation, which contributes to the demand for this cruel product.

Experts estimate that up to 73 million sharks are killed each year to supply the global demand for shark fins. This unsustainable slaughter is contributing to massive declines in shark populations worldwide. Of the 1,045 species of sharks and rays categorized in the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List, 30 percent are classified as Threatened or Near Threatened. Complicating matters, sharks are particularly vulnerable to overfishing because they are slow to reach reproductive maturity and produce very few offspring. Their low reproductive rates mean that once severely depleted, populations can take years or even decades to recover.

As apex predators at the top of ocean food chains, sharks are crucial to the survival of ecosystems. Research shows that the massive depletion of sharks has cascading effects throughout the oceans' ecosystems. Apex predators prevent an overabundance prey populations, preserving balance among ocean species.

The international community has been paying attention. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), to which the United States was an original signatory in 1973, has recently added sharks to the CITES appendices, for the first time regulating commercial fish species as a result of the global alarm over shark finning. These include oceanic whitetip, porbeagle, and various species of hammerheads.

As long as there is a market for shark fins – including right here in New Jersey – and finning continues unabated, shark populations will continue to plummet and marine ecosystems suffer the consequences.

## **Solutions**

If sharks are fished, the only way to effectively enforce a ban on shark finning is to require that they be brought to shore with their fins still attached to their bodies. Born Free USA believes it is the responsibility of state legislatures to do everything in their power to stop the decimation of shark populations, particularly states with coastal ports such as New Jersey. 9 states and 3 territories – including 4 on the east coast – have already passed bans on the commercialization of fins, and it is time for New Jersey to do the same.

There is no economic, cultural, or other justification for selling a product from such a vulnerable species. I sincerely hope that the Senate Economic Growth Committee votes in favor of S. 2057.

Thank you for your consideration.