

Sept. 10, 2009 8:30 am

# FLORIDA FWC MEETING:

**IF SHARKS ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU, PLEASE COME TO THIS MEETING. SPEAK OUT IN DEFENSE OF FLORIDA'S SHARKS... BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!**

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## A RECIPE FOR DISASTER FOR FLORIDA'S LEMON SHARKS

**As regulations tighten for other fish, lemons sharks and other large coastal shark species- already in trouble! - are facing increased fishing pressure. FWC is seeking feedback from the public on options for amending its shark management rules. Fishermen are gearing up to target lemon sharks now. Please help.**

Please join Dr. Samuel Gruber, Walt Stearns, publisher of the Underwater Journal, and others who are concerned about the fate of Florida's sharks in this effort to save lemon sharks and other highly vulnerable sharks.

As a member of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, Florida must comply with measures put in place by the ASMFC. Florida may adopt measures that are more restrictive however. The proposed changes include:

- \* Modification to the definition of finning
- \* Gear limitations for sharks - hook and line only
- \* Finning and Filleting at sea prohibited
- \* Federal permit required for commercial harvest of sharks
- \* Commercial seasons and closures to coincide with ASMFC
- \* **Size Limit** - Minimum size limit of 54 inches (fork length) for all but 6 shark species.
- \* **Prohibited Species** - Addition of Silky, Sandbar and Caribbean Sharpnose Shark to prohibited species list.

The last two items are the important ones. Only two of Florida's large coastal shark species reach sexual maturity at a size lower than 54 inches - the

### Life History - Size at sexual maturity\*

Large coastal species:	inches	Small coastal species:	inches
Great hammerhead	92	Finetooth shark	45
Tiger shark	88	Blacknose shark	38
Nurse shark	88	Atlantic sharpnose shark	25
Lemon shark	88	Caribbean sharpnose shark	23
Smooth hammerhead	82	Bonnethead	20
Silky shark	72		
Spinner shark	62	Pelagic species:	inches
Bull shark	61	Shortfin mako	76
Scalloped hammerhead	55	Thresher shark	72
Sandbar shark	49	Oceanic whitetip shark	68
Blacktip shark	47	Blue shark	66
		Porbeagle shark	62
		Sevengill shark	29



Blacknose Shark

\* Data summarized from fishbase.org

**Only two of the large coastal sharks – Sandbar and Blacktip – reach sexual maturity at a size lower than 54 inches - the proposed minimum harvest size limit.**

proposed minimum harvest size.

If the intent is to prevent harvest of animals before they've had the chance to reproduce, then the FWC have blatantly ignored the vast majority of large coastal sharks. Furthermore the idea of protecting the young animals to give them a chance to reproduce before harvest does not apply to sharks.

Many of the bony fishes reproduce by spawning – thousands of eggs – and many of these fish also have very short life cycles. Pacific Salmon, for example, live only about two years and die soon after spawning. When fishermen harvest these fish after they've spawned, they're harvesting fish that were about to die anyway.

Sharks on the other hand, take many years to reach sexual maturity, 12 - 15 years for lemon sharks. Many sharks only mate once every two to three years, have long - one year or more - gestation periods, give birth to small number of live young ..... and these young sharks are subject to high mortality rates!

## Lemon sharks at high risk

The “aggregating” behavior of lemon sharks puts them at even higher risk. Satellite tagging research has proven that the lemon sharks that aggregate off Florida's coastline have come from all up and down the East Coast of the US and the Bahamas. These large gatherings that take place in a small regional area close to shore with a highly predictable time frame, make them easy targets for fishermen.

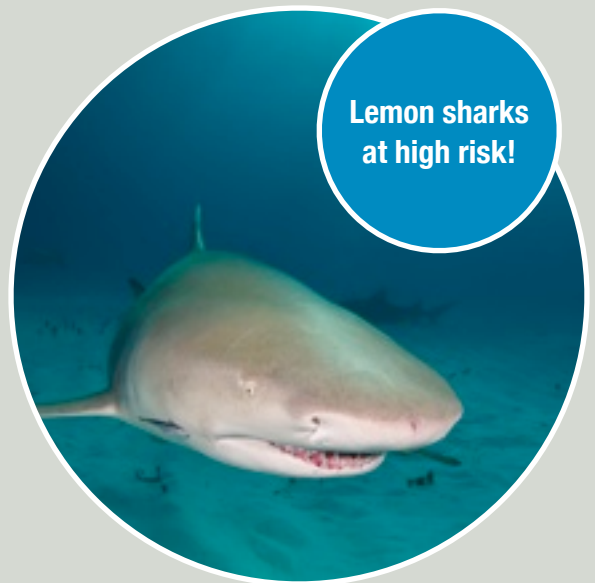
What makes matters even worse for the lemons sharks is the additional restrictions being placed on commercial and recreational fishermen for fish such as groupers and snappers, giving fishermen additional incentives to target sharks.

And the gear restriction of hook and line only is another reason for fishermen to target lemons. Since lemons spend their entire lives in coastal habitats in 1 to 200 feet of water, they are easily accessible by hook and line.

The end result is a recipe for disaster for lemon sharks in Florida and the entire East Coast of the US! Lemon sharks need protection and must be added to the Prohibited Species List.

## How can you help?

Go to the meeting on September 10th and let the FWC know that you want to see stronger protections for lemon sharks and other large coastal species, like Great and Scalloped Hammerheads and Tiger Sharks. All of these species area heavily targeted by both commercial and recreational fishers, and have become increasingly scarce in State and Federal waters.



## Focus on Lemon sharks

Our primary focus, however, should be lemon sharks, since they are most vulnerable to commercial exploitation this winter when they start to aggregate off our coasts. Lemon sharks are considered by the National Marine Fisheries Service and the ASMFC as a “highly vulnerable species” of large coastal sharks.

Based on the data that Dr. Samuel Gruber has learned through his 44 years of studying lemon sharks and research compiled from South Florida's Lemon Shark Aggregation study, “highly vulnerable is a serious understatement. The situation is absolutely critical and we must speak up now before it's too late for our lemon sharks!!

### Resources:

[Meeting agenda and details](#)

[FWC Shark Management Draft Rule](#)

[Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission - Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Coastal Sharks](#)

[Lifestyle of Sharks Report by Dr. Samuel Gruber](#)

[Walt Stearns report from Dania Beach FWC Shark Management Public Workshop in June](#)

### Links to supporters

[Underwater Journal - Walt Stearns](#)  
[Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation](#)  
[The Shark Foundation](#)  
[Shark Savers](#)  
[Bimini Shark Lab](#)  
[Shark Safe Network](#)  
[Shark-Free Marinas](#)