

What do the world's leading shark researchers think of shark conservation policy?

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A hammerhead shark caught on fishing gear as part of the University of Miami Abess Center's Shark Research and Conservation Program's field research.
Credit: Neil Hammerschlag

University of Miami (UM) Abess Center for Ecosystem Science and Policy researchers investigated the conservation policy preferences of shark scientists, as well as their personal histories of conservation advocacy and their opinions about the environmental non-profit community. This survey of over 100 scientists and natural resource managers from all over the world is the first to assess the collective expertise of the world's largest professional shark research societies. The survey results are published today in the journal *Conservation Biology*.

Many policymakers, scientists, environmental activists, and members of the public are concerned about shark conservation. People want to help, but there is an ongoing debate about the most effective conservation and management policies, including whether sustainable fisheries management or banning all fishing is the best course of action. Survey responses indicate that most shark scientists broadly support most available conservation policies. However, a large majority supports regulations that allow for sustainable fishing over attempts to eliminate all fishing if and when possible.

"Shark researchers support a wide range of policies, but generally believe that sustainable fisheries exploitation of [sharks](#) is possible, is happening in a few (but not very many) places currently, and should be the goal of future conservation policymaking instead of trying to ban fishing if and when possible," said David Shiffman, UM Ph.D. candidate and lead author of the study.

Survey results also show that:

- Shark researchers believe that advocating on behalf of ocean conservation is both appropriate and necessary. Scientists reported signing petitions, calling elected officials, and including specific policy recommendations in their publications. For shark scientists, conservation is a priority acted on both personally and

professionally.

- Shark researchers were more supportive of sustainable fishing practices versus those which ban all shark fishing. However, many respondents came from developed nations which have the resources to manage a sustainable fishery, unlike the small island states which have been the first to ban all shark fishing.
- Shark researchers are generally pleased with the state of environmental non-profit shark conservation advocacy, and many reported having volunteered their time or expertise to help these organizations.

However, respondents shared concerns about some bad actors in the environmental community who use incorrect facts to focus on issues that are flashy but not the most pressing.

"Researchers believe that there is no single policy that will solve all shark conservation problems, and that the best policy choice is going to be situation specific, said Neil Hammerschlag, Ph.D. Director of UM's Shark Research & Conservation Program (SRC) and Research Assistant Professor at the Abess Center and Rosenstiel School. "Given increasing concern for many shark populations worldwide, we hope our research leads to more insight to aid in the continued understanding and implantation of effective [conservation](#) strategies."

More information: David Shiffman et al. Preferred conservation polices of shark researchers, *Conservation Biology* (2015). [DOI: 10.1111/cobi.12668](https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12668)

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