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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3303

November 1, 2017

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

I would like to thank you for your fight for American jobs. In your work as secretary you have demonstrated a refreshing commitment to American workers on numerous occasions, and it is greatly appreciated.

I am writing to make you aware of a legislative threat to the jobs of many hard working Americans in my Eastern North Carolina congressional district and other coastal areas across the country. These good people are employed in the responsible harvest of sharks in U.S. waters.

As mandated by federal law, the domestic shark fishery is managed sustainably by the Department of Commerce's NOAA Fisheries branch. According to renowned shark scientist, Dr. Robert E. Heuter of Florida's Mote Marine Lab, America has "one of the best systems in the world for shark fisheries management and conservation." The proof can be seen in NOAA Fisheries own data. NOAA Fisheries' 2015 coastal shark survey captured and tagged "more than 2,800 sharks, the most in the survey's 29-year history." The leader of the survey stated that NOAA Fisheries has "seen an increase in the number of sharks in every survey since 2001," and the agency called the survey results "very good news for shark populations."

Despite that success, legislation has been introduced in the House and Senate that threatens to all but eliminate the U.S. shark fishery, and the American jobs that go with it. The bills – H.R. 1456 and S. 793 – purport to be an attempt to stop the practice of shark finning (i.e. the process of removing fins at sea and discarding the shark). They seek to do so by banning the sale of fins, even those harvested legally here in the United States.

However well intentioned the bill sponsors may be, the fact is that shark finning has been illegal in the United States for many years. Advocates for the legislation have countered with the false allegation that the practice is still widespread. They publicly claimed that NOAA Fisheries had 500 cases of shark finning over the last several years. That number sounded impossibly high, so in August my staff asked NOAA Fisheries for the real number of federal shark finning violations assessed over the past five years. According to NOAA, the real number is not 500, it is 22. The Associated Press recently ran a story correcting the record on the 'fake news' claims distributed by the bill's supporters. You can find that story here:

<http://www.savingseafood.org/news/washington/agency-gave-bad-data-senator-trying-stop-shark-finning/>.

Mr. Secretary, you know how important good jobs are to America's future. The sustainably managed U.S. shark fishery helps many hard working people in Eastern North Carolina and across the country support their families and their communities. If foreign countries are failing to manage their shark populations appropriately, they should change their ways. But we should not put U.S. fishermen out of business in the process.


In the coming days, the administration may be asked to weigh in. For the sake of the American fishermen who make this country great, I respectfully ask you to oppose these bills. Thank you for your service and your consideration.

Sincerely,



Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress

*Mr. Secretary,
Thank you for
your leadership and
service to our Nation!*



Cc: Chairman Rob Bishop, House Natural Resources Committee
Chairman Doug Lamborn, House Subcommittee on Water, Power & Oceans