



# MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

18 April 2011

Attn: Board Members

Mr. William Aila  
Department of Land and Natural Resources  
1151 Punchbowl Street, Room 130  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Mr. Aila:

The Marine Mammal Commission understands that the Board of the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources is considering a permit request to remove 19 Galapagos sharks from the waters around French Frigate Shoals in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The purpose of the removal is to protect Hawaiian monk seal pups. Doing so is critical for recovering this species and, the Commission believes, for restoring the unique and remarkable ecosystems of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

We are sure that the scientists from the National Marine Fisheries Service have informed you about the difficult nature of this problem and the importance of resolving it. We expect that they have provided you with the most up-to-date information on the decline of the monk seal population at French Frigate Shoals and the role of Galapagos and tiger sharks. The biological information underlying this matter is not perfect—in the management of natural ecosystems, such information rarely is. But, in our view, the information is sufficiently compelling to warrant the proposed removals, as unpleasant as they may be.

We also are very sympathetic with you and your board members and recognize the difficult position that you are in. Throughout our nation's waters, decision makers and leaders are faced with similar types of decisions, where they must take unpleasant actions to promote a greater good. Our hope in taking such actions is not just that we help restore our rich and life-giving ecosystems, but that we also spare future generations from having to implement even more difficult solutions if this and similar situations are allowed to worsen.

We also expect that you know that Hawaii offers our best opportunity for saving at least one representative of the monk seal genus. Through lack of action, we have lost the Caribbean monk seal, and the Mediterranean species is even more endangered than the Hawaiian monk seal. The risks to the Hawaiian monk seal are real, and each and every threat to it must be taken seriously. Almost no threat is more serious than one that removes young female pups for they represent the species' reproductive potential and, indeed, the species' sole bridge to the future.

The Marine Mammal Commission is composed of people who have spent their entire lives trying to understand and conserve our nation's marine resources. We do not take requests such as the one before you lightly. Given an easier choice, we would not want to see the sharks removed. But we see no alternative if we want to save the Hawaiian monk seal species, and the shark population should easily be able to sustain this level of removal without any adverse impact. We

Mr. William Aila  
18 April 2011  
Page 2

believe that saving a species for future generations must take precedence, and we urge you to approve this permit.

Thank you for consideration of our views. Please let us know if we can provide additional information to help you with your decision.

Sincerely and with respect,



Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

Cc: Mr. Thomas Edgerton  
Ms. Lisa Van Atta  
Ms. Aulani Wilhelm