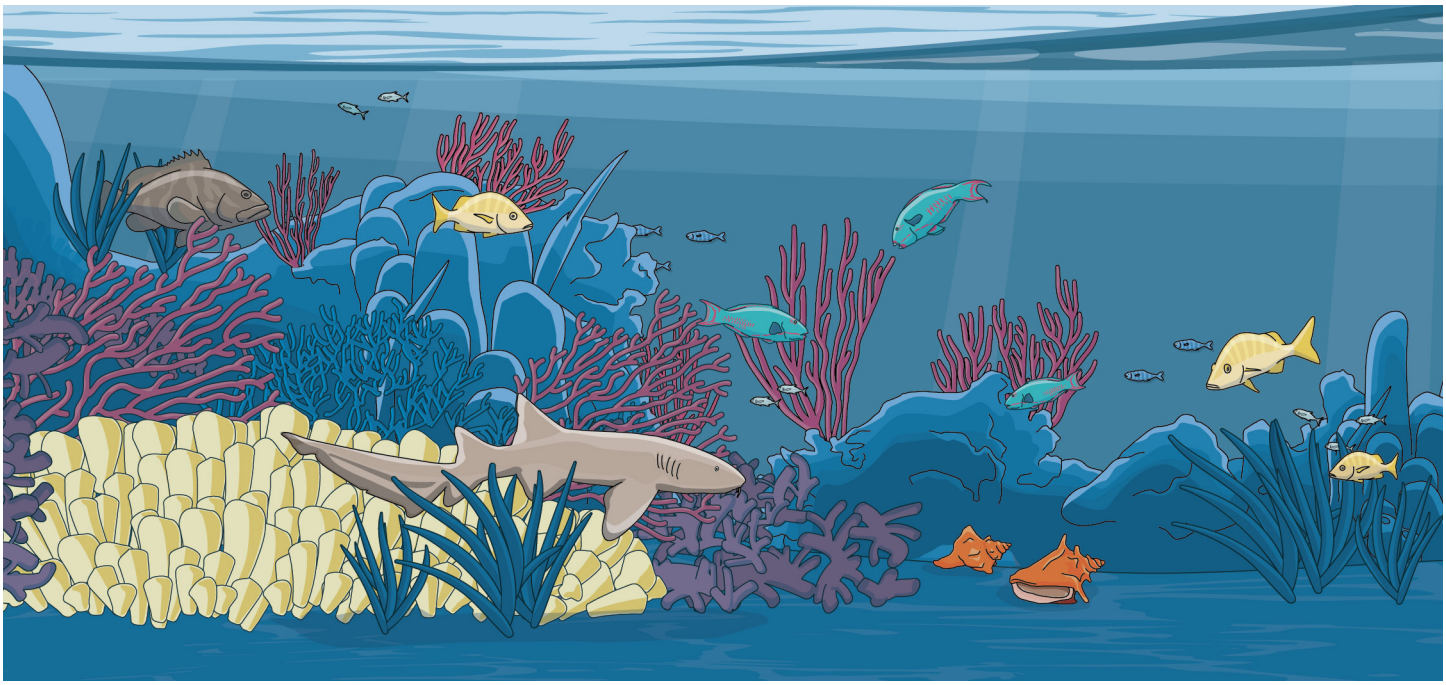
A fact sheet from THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS | Dec 2014



Protecting Sharks in the Caribbean

People need healthy oceans, and healthy oceans need sharks

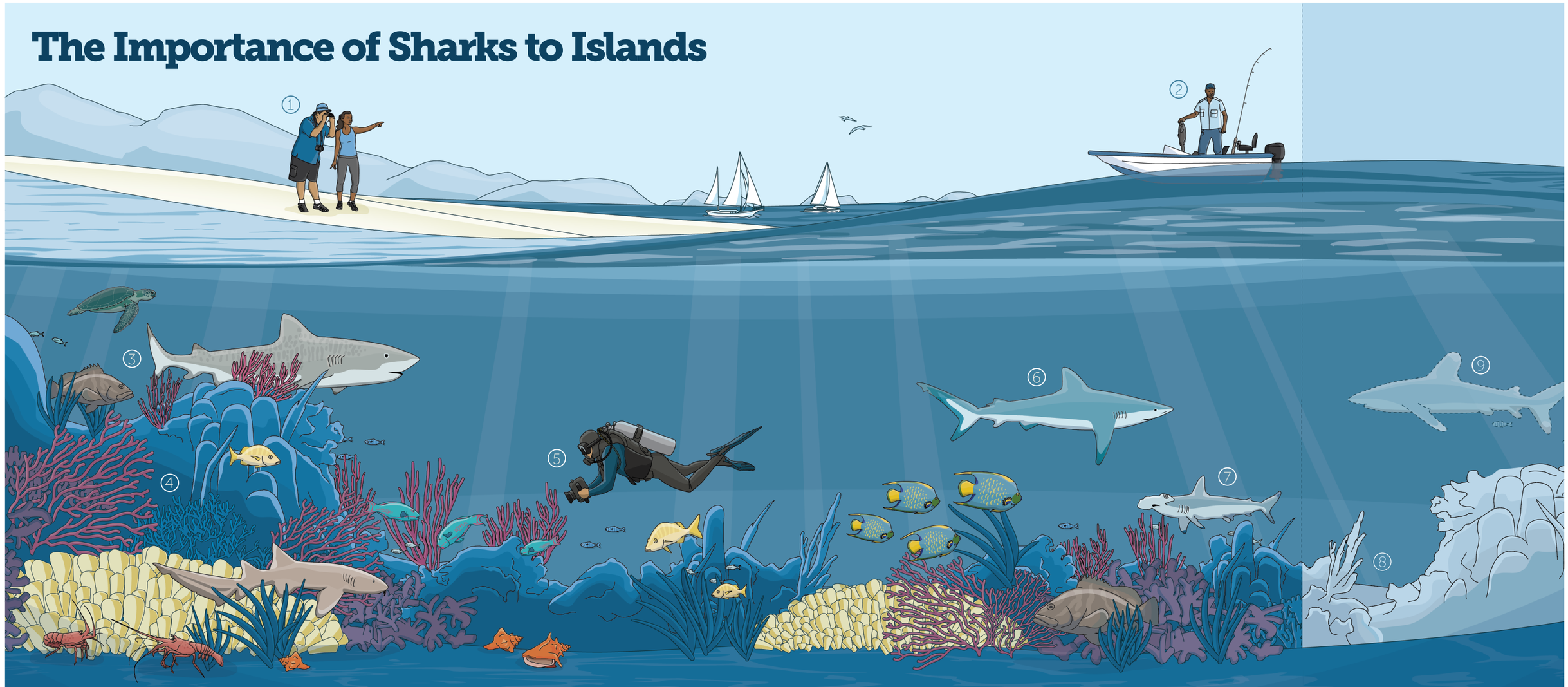
Sharks need our help. Many of the more than 500 species swimming in the ocean today are not equipped to withstand the growing number of human-related threats they face.

Because sharks grow slowly, are late to mature, and produce few young, they are especially vulnerable to overfishing and slow to recover from depletion. The demand for fins and other shark products has driven a number of species close to extinction.

The Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, and Honduras are the first Caribbean governments to establish shark sanctuaries throughout their exclusive economic zones (EEZs). All three have banned the commercial fishing and trade of sharks throughout their waters. By committing to these comprehensive and permanent conservation measures, they have established themselves as global leaders in protecting these animals, which are vital to the health of the oceans.

In May 2013, during the Summit of Caribbean Political and Business Leaders on Necker Island in the British Virgin Islands, a number of governments agreed to the urgent need to create protections for sharks and rays across the whole Caribbean region within two years. The Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines committed to increasing regionwide protections. With a growing recognition of the need for, and benefits of, protecting these ocean predators, the Caribbean has the potential to become a critical region for shark conservation.

The Importance of Sharks to Islands



1 Healthy reefs drive economies

Reefs are also vital to tourism. They provide much of the white sand for the beaches we love, and attract divers, snorkelers, sailing and yachting enthusiasts, and recreational fishers.

2 Reefs protect us and provide for us

Coral reefs help protect coastal communities and infrastructure from the impacts of wave action and storms. They also provide shelter, breeding areas, nurseries, and food for shellfish, invertebrates, and fish. The waters surrounding reefs are a significant source of protein for over a billion people globally.

3 Top predator in the food web

Sharks help maintain the health of marine life in the ocean, including populations of commercially important fish species. Like wolves and other top predators on land, sharks play an important role in the ecosystem and should gain similar protections.

4 Healthy reefs need sharks

Science now shows that sharks help maintain the health of coral reefs.[1]

5 Sharks are worth more alive than dead

An individual reef shark is estimated to have a lifetime value of US$1.9 million to the tourism industry.[2] In contrast, the value of a dead shark is estimated at about US$108.

6 More like whales than fish

Unlike other fish, sharks grow slowly, mature late, and produce few young over long lifetimes. As a result, they are at high risk of overexploitation and slow to recover from depletion.

7 Not just fins

Approximately 100 million sharks are killed every year in commercial fisheries.[3] Products include fins, meat, skins, liver oil, and jaws.

8 The danger of not knowing

The loss of sharks in our oceans can lead to unpredictable consequences, including the possible collapse of important fisheries and the loss of corals and other marine habitats.

9 Threatened with extinction

Nearly 30% of known shark species fully assessed by scientists are threatened with extinction. Another 26% are close to becoming threatened in the near future.

Defining permanent protections for sharks

Shark sanctuaries are the strongest measures that governments can put in place to permanently protect sharks in their waters. These protections establish national or territory-wide fishing regulations through decrees, legislation, or regulatory amendments that prohibit the commercial fishing of sharks throughout their EEZs. To be most effective, these measures should:

- Prohibit commercial fishing of sharks in the entire EEZ, not just in certain areas. This ensures that sharks are protected everywhere under that government's jurisdiction.
- Prohibit the sale, import, export, and possession of sharks and shark parts, including fins.
- Impose steep fines for violations that match the high value of shark fins.
- Prohibit the use of fishing gear used to target sharks, such as wire leaders and shark lines from longline fishing vessels.
- Implement policies and laws that make enforcement at port easier and more likely to occur, such as banning transshipment of catch at sea and adopting the UN Food and Agriculture Organization Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing.

Healthy commercial fish stocks need healthy coral reefs, and healthy reefs need sharks. By permanently protecting sharks, the governments of the Caribbean can strengthen the resilience of their marine environments and secure the industries that depend on a healthy ocean.

Endnotes

1 Jonathan L. W. Ruppert et al., "Caught in the Middle: Combined Impacts of Shark Removal and Coral Loss on the Fish Communities of Coral Reefs," *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 9 (2013): e74648, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0074648, http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0074648.

2 G.M.S. Vianna et al., *Wanted Dead or Alive? The Relative Value of Reef Sharks as a Fishery and an Ecotourism Asset in Palau* (Perth: Australian Institute of Marine Science and University of Western Australia, 2010), http://www.pewtrusts.org/~/media/Imported-and-Legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/protecting_ocean_life/Palaueconomicanalysisforsharkspdf.pdf.

3 Boris Worm et al., "Global Catches, Exploitation Rates, and Rebuilding Options for Sharks," *Marine Policy* 40 (2013): 194–204, doi:10.1016/j.marpol.2012.12.034, http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X13000055.

Contact: Barbara Cvrkel, communications officer
Email: bcvrkel@pewtrusts.org
Phone: 202-540-6535
Project website: pewtrusts.org/sharks

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