

HAMMERHEADS AND TIGER SHARKS



ABOVE: A Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting in the Terrace Building in Sarasota about putting hammerhead and tiger sharks on the prohibited species list. TOP LEFT: Bill Goldschmitt leads a small protest with his sons (middle) Billy Goldschmitt, 25, and David Goldschmitt, 18, outside the Terrace Building. TOP RIGHT: Bill Goldschmitt during the meeting. STAFF PHOTOS / THOMAS BENDER

Sharks could gain protection in state waters

PROTEST: Fishermen say the toothy predators need to be kept in check

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SARASOTA COUNTY — The state is considering adding more protection in Florida waters for two species of sharks — the tiger and hammerhead — due to concerns about the future viability of the species.

But the proposal has riled up some anglers who prize those

and other sharks as trophy game fish, and do not want to see more made off-limits to fishing.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission is holding hearings around the state, including one in Sarasota this week, to determine whether the sharks are in need of more protection.

During the public meetings, the agency is listening to opinions about whether it should put hammerheads and tigers on a list of prohibited species for commercial and recreational fishermen.

The idea infuriates fisherman

See SHARKS on 3B

THE CANDIDATES

State officials are considering whether to add protections to two more sharks. Here is a look at the hammerhead and tiger shark:

Hammerhead sharks

Hammerheads are unmistakable due to their wide, thick heads that resemble a hammer at both ends. Their eyes are far apart, enabling them to see in various directions. Their dorsal fins are large and pointed. They prefer deeper tropic and subtropic waters. Hammerheads can range from 12 to 20 feet long and weigh from 500 to 1,000 pounds.



Tiger sharks

Tiger sharks also enjoy warm water. They often reside near the surface and in shallow water. Considered very aggressive, they hunt at night. They average about 12 feet in length and weigh from 850 to 2,000 pounds. They are so named because of stripes that resemble those of a tiger. Their dorsal fins are close to their tails. Tiger sharks are caught for their meat and to make Vitamin A supplements.



SOURCE: Sharks-world.com

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Sharks may gain state protection

SHARKS from 1B
Bill Goldschmitt of Cortez in Manatee County, who protested outside the wildlife commission meeting in Sarasota on Thursday.

"It's the eco-fanatics, the animal rights advocates who have never caught a fish in their life," Goldschmitt said. He refers to "environmental extremists" as the greater danger, calling them "land sharks."

Goldschmitt knows sharks — at least from the standpoint of personal experience.

In his autobiography, "Sharkman of Cortez," he tells of hunting and catching thousands of sharks since he was a youth, and he frequently organizes shark fishing tournaments.

He thinks activists try to depict sharks as the misunderstood "Bambi of the sea." He sees them as killers of turtles and tarpon whose numbers should not be allowed to get out of control.

He adamantly disagrees

and opposes more "ridiculous regulations" that he thinks are making Florida's fishermen the true "endangered species."

He also blames any push to classify sharks as protected on "rent-a-scientists" and government officials who do the bidding of the tourism industry.

Yet marine scientists contend there may be cause for concern about the two species.

The number of hammerhead and tiger sharks have significantly declined from 25 years ago, with many dying when commercial fishermen catch them unintentionally, said Dr. Robert Hueter, Mote Marine's director of shark research.

"They don't handle being caught very well on commercial gear," Hueter said, especially the hammerheads.

Hammerheads might seem plentiful in this area and Boca Grande because they come here to feed on



Bill Goldschmitt, who organizes shark fishing tournaments, leads a small protest outside the Terrace Building before a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting. STAFF PHOTO / THOMAS BENDER

tarpon, Hueter said. But the overall number in the Atlantic Ocean have been significantly depleted.

Shark fishing tournament winners in the 1980s usually landed huge tigers, as big as 800 pounds with some pups, Hueter said. Tournament results show significantly smaller winning catches since then, he said.

Hueter gave formal feedback to FWC for protecting the sharks in state waters — 9 miles off the Gulf coast and 3 miles off the Atlantic coast.

"I just think that a risk-averse approach to their con-

servation is the best," Hueter said.

Last week, the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation announced that over the next four years it intends to give as much as \$120,000 for the University of Miami Dunlap Marine Conservation Program to research the issue.

The foundation started by Harvey, a renowned marine artist and biologist, wants to know whether Florida shark populations are being depleted because of "unsustainable fishing practices" and, if so, the impact on "the entire marine ecosystem."