



Department of Justice

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SHARK FINS DEALER PLEADS GUILTY TO ILLEGALLY DEALING IN FINS FROM PROTECTED SPECIES

Atlanta, GA – MARK L. HARRISON, 47, of Southport, Florida, and “HARRISON INTERNATIONAL LLC,” a Florida corporation, today pleaded guilty in federal district court to violating the Lacey Act, a federal fish and wildlife trafficking law, by dealing in shark fins and not reporting their landing as required by law. In addition, MARK HARRISON pleaded guilty to a second count related to his attempted export of shark fins of species that are prohibited to harvest under laws of the State of Florida. MARK HARRISON also pleaded to trading in shark fins that had been prepared, packed or held under insanitary conditions.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said, “There is an immense trade in wildlife products. Those who trade in wildlife, however, must comply with federal and state statutes and regulations intended to protect these important natural resources. We will support the investigative work of agencies that identify violations of these laws, and we commend the teamwork of the investigators who brought these wildlife violations to our attention.”

Special Agent in Charge for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Southeast Region Hal Robbins said, “We will not tolerate the illegal harvest and sale of protected shark species whose populations continue to diminish in our oceans. We are pleased with the apprehension of this defendant, who we believe is one of the country’s largest commercial shark fin buyers, and I applaud the efforts of the prosecutors and agents involved in this multi-agency federal investigation.”

Special Agent in Charge, Southeast Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement, James Gale said, “We are proud of the coordinated investigative work of our agents with their colleagues from NOAA, Office of Law Enforcement and the Food and Drug Administration Office of Criminal

Investigations. This case is an excellent example of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's commitment to investigate and interdict the commercialization of protected wildlife species.”

According to United States Attorney Nahmias, the charges and other information presented in court: HARRISON represented himself to be the nation’s largest shark fin buyer, purchasing “millions” of shark fins over the years since 1989 that he had been in the business. In February 2005, HARRISON purchased shark fins in Florida from an individual fisherman and later resold them in interstate commerce. No report of the landing or sale of those fins was filed with any Florida authorities, as required by law.

In August 2007, HARRISON attempted to export through Atlanta a shipment of shark fins that included at least 211 fins from Caribbean sharp-nosed sharks, 2 fins from bignose sharks, and 2 fins from night sharks, all of which are protected by Florida and/or federal laws due to their low population levels.

Finally, the plea agreements reveal that for almost four years, HARRISON processed shark fins by drying them on open air racks and/or tarpaulins laid on the ground, outdoors, on his property in Southport, Florida. The fins were left out at all times until dry and were exposed to bird droppings and insects. Dogs ran freely among the drying racks. HARRISON then sold the dried fins and shipped them in interstate commerce through the Northern District of Georgia.

HARRISON is scheduled to be sentenced on August 19, 2009, at 9:30 a.m., before United States Magistrate Judge Russell Vineyard. He faces a maximum sentence of one year in federal prison, and a fine of up to \$100,000. His company faces a maximum fine of \$200,000. In determining the actual sentence, the Court will consider the United States Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide appropriate sentencing ranges for most offenders.

The Lacey Act, enacted in 1900, is the first national wildlife law and was passed to assist states in enforcing wildlife laws. It provides additional protection to fish, wildlife, and plants that were taken, possessed, transported or sold in violation of state, tribal, foreign, or federal law. Since 1993, the NOAA Fisheries Service has managed, through federal fishery management plans, the commercial harvest and sale of sharks in or from federal waters of the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea. In 1998, the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization finalized and adopted an “International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks,” recognizing the worldwide pressure

being placed on declining shark populations by commercial fishing and the demand for shark fin soup. U.S. management of sharks has included prohibitions against retaining and/or selling particular species, including some in which HARRISON was dealing, the populations of which are so reduced that further harvesting cannot be sustained. There are currently 19 federally protected species of sharks.

This case was investigated by Special Agents of the NOAA Office for Law Enforcement, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement, and the Food and Drug Administration Office of Criminal Investigations.

Assistant United States Attorney Mary C. Roemer and the Justice Department's Environmental Crimes Section prosecuted the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.