



# Department of Justice

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Northern District of Georgia

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## **SHARK FINS DEALER SENTENCED FOR ILLEGALLY DEALING IN FINS FROM PROTECTED SPECIES**

ATLANTA, GA – MARK L. HARRISON, 48, of Southport, Florida, and “HARRISON INTERNATIONAL LLC,” a Florida corporation, were sentenced today on multiple charges including 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.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said, “This case highlights the importance of compliance with federal and state wildlife statutes and regulations. We are satisfied that today's sentences will alert those who trade in protected species of the potential for criminal consequences if they do not follow the law.”

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Assistant Special Agent in Charge Paul Raymond said, “The U.S. has been an international leader in passing strong shark finning laws that prohibit wasteful practices, and it is good to see these laws effectively enforced. We are appreciative of the collaborative investigative work of the Agents with NOAA, USFWS, and the FDA, as well as the federal prosecutors with the U.S. Attorney’s Office.”

James Gale, Special Agent in Charge for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement Southeast Region, said, “The sentences today were the result of a lengthy and complex investigation conducted jointly by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agents, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement Special Agents, and Food and Drug Administration, Office of Criminal Investigation Special Agents. Hopefully, this sentence will raise the public's awareness of how unlawful commercialization impacts certain species of wildlife.”

HARRISON was sentenced to probation for five years, ordered to pay a fine of \$5,000, and ordered to perform 150 hours of community service. He was also ordered to take out an advertisement in a publication of wide circulation within the fish industry regarding compliance with shark fin reporting requirements. HARRISON INTERNATIONAL was sentenced to pay a fine of \$5,000 and placed on probation for five years. HARRISON and his company pleaded guilty to the charges on June 12, 2009.

According to United States Attorney Nahmias 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 (bringing to shore) 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. 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.

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](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan).