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CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT SHARKS IN THE BAHAMAS IS STEPPED UP

MARINE wildlife artist Guy Harvey launched a custom-designed logo for the campaign to protect sharks in Bahamian waters at Bahamas National Trust's Retreat Gardens in Village Road yesterday.

The Jamaican-born artist, scientist and conservationist renowned for his popular T-shirt designs, also spoke to the press and members of the Trust about work the Guy Harvey Research Institute (GHRI) has done to aid understanding of the importance of sharks.



Mr Harvey is the latest celebrity to lend his voice to the campaign led by the Pew Environment Group and the Bahamas National Trust (BNT) calling for the enactment of legislation that will prevent commercial shark fishing in the Bahamas.

Shark populations around the world are under threat of extinction as they are increasingly targetted for their fins to be served in the East Asian delicacy shark fin soup.

Matt Rand, director of the Pew Environment Group's Global Shark Conservation Campaign, estimates 100 million sharks are killed every year, including 73 million exclusively for their fins, and the remainder as by-catch in longline fishing.

However the Bahamas boasts one of the most diverse and abundant shark populations in the region, and one of the healthiest in the world, owing to a ban on longline fishing in the Bahamas 20 years ago.

The healthy shark populations ensures the health of the reef and success of other fisheries, they also draw an income of around \$78 million a year from dive-related tourism.

However their vulnerability became apparent when it was revealed in The Tribune that a seafood export company in Andros was interested in exploring the possibility of shark finning for export to Hong Kong.

Months later Pew and the BNT launched the shark protection campaign and petition for new legislation which has now gathered 4,000 signatures in support.

Mr Rand said: "The diversity and numbers of sharks, and the ability for people to interact and see them here is hands down, the best that I've seen globally.

"It's a remarkable resource, it helps keep the ecosystem functioning healthily, and they are a remarkable creature that's largely misunderstood."

Mr Harvey agreed there is still much work to be done to "de-vilify" the graceful creatures.

"The damage caused by the press in the past has been enormous and that all needs to be turned around," Mr Harvey said.

"So it is with great pleasure that we have hooked up with the Bahamas National Trust, the Pew foundation, and a lot of other organisations, as we're all working together towards the same end, which is sustainability in the use of marine resources."

GHRI director Mahmood Shivji has tagged 37 tiger sharks, mostly in Bermuda, and found they migrated directly to the Bahamas and remained there for several months before swimming out to the mid-Atlantic and then returning to the Bahamas the following year.

Dr Shivji said: "There's something about this ecosystem that is bringing these sharks back here from very far away, which is all the more reason to protect the sharks in the Bahamas.

"These are amazing migratory animals. You can't just protect them within the boundaries of a national park because these animals move, so there has to be a regional approach and the Bahamas can really take a lead in this, not only to protect healthy marine ecosystems in the Bahamas but internationally."

Dr Shivji said the GHRI tagged four tiger sharks in the Bahamas in December, and Mr Harvey promised students he spoke to at CV Bethel Senior High School yesterday morning the next shark they tag will be named CV Bethel after them.

Students will be able to follow the sharks movements with updates from the GHRI over the coming year.

The shark campaign was launched by Pew and the BNT in September last year in the wake of revelations published in The Tribune

A petition calling for legislation to protect sharks in the Bahamas has gathered

For more information about the Guy Harvey Research Institute log on to:
<http://www.nova.edu/ocean/ghri/>.