

Bill would enforce shark finning laws

Increasing numbers of species are reported becoming endangered

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WASHINGTON — Sharks would be better protected from finning and overfishing under a bill now awaiting debate and a vote by the full House.

"This legislation doesn't create a lot of new rules against shark finning," said U.S. Rep. Neil Abercrombie, D-Hawai'i, a co-sponsor of the bill. "It's a matter of closing loopholes and enforcing the laws we already have on the books."

The bill, approved on a voice vote Wednesday by the House Natural Resources Committee, would crack down on fishermen who harvest millions of sharks annually, cut off their fins — primarily for use in shark fin soup — and toss the bodies back into the sea.

Current law bans finning but enforcement is difficult because a loophole allows a boat to transport fins as long as the sharks were not finned aboard the vessel, but it doesn't stop the fins from being handed off to a second boat.

"Finning allows fishers to take sharks in unsustainable volumes, and increasing numbers of shark species are becoming endangered," said Patricia Forkan, president of Humane Society International.

Delegate Madeleine Z. Bordallo, D-Guam, sponsor of the bill, said the legislation closes the loophole by requiring that fins remain naturally attached to sharks when they are brought ashore.

"We will continue to work toward full passage of this bill ... to strengthen U.S. conservation efforts that are already in place for the protection of shark populations," said Bordallo, chairwoman of the House Natural Resources fisheries subcommittee.