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January 24, 2015

CITES Australia,

Complaint: A case of 'Conflict of Interest' involving Fishwell Consulting

We are writing to complain to you about a case of 'Conflict of Interest' involving Dr. Ian Knuckey and Matt Koopman of Fishwell Consulting, who in 2014 advised the Australian Government on the sustainable harvesting of CITES Appendix II shark species, at the same time as they were advising Cathay Pacific Airways on the sustainable exploitation of Australian shark fins. This complaint is made on the following grounds:

Advice to the Australian Government

In 2014, Koopman and Knuckey prepared the following report for the Department of the Environment:

Koopman, M. and Knuckey, I. (2014). Advice on CITES Appendix II Shark Listings. Report to Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Fishwell Consulting. 144 pp.

Using this report, the Department of the Environment published the following report:

Non-Detriment Findings (NDF) report for the export of shark species listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and harvested from Australian waters (2014).

This report's conclusion states - "*This NDF finding is based on many sources of information available for the five CITES Appendix II listed shark species including the Simpfendorfer scientific assessment (2014) and the Koopman and Knuckey analysis of Australian fisheries (2014)*".

Advice to Cathay Pacific Airways

At the same time as Koopman and Knuckey were preparing their report for the Department of the Environment, they were also advising Cathay Pacific Airways on how they could ensure their exploitation of Australian shark fins for the Chinese market could continue to operate in a legal and sustainable manner. Their report for Cathay Pacific Airways is entitled:

"Knuckey, I., Sant, G. and Koopman, M. (2014). Options for traceability of shark products through the Cathay Pacific supply chain to prove sustainable and legal provenance. Prepared by Fishwell Consulting and TRAFFIC for Cathay Pacific Airways Limited. Unpublished"

[Source: TRAFFIC: Traceability Systems in the CITES Context. 2015: Victoria Mundy and Glenn Sant].



We have checked both the Koopman and Knuckey report for the Department of the Environment report on CITES Appendix II Shark Listings and the Department of the Environment NDF report for the export of CITES listed shark species and can find no disclosure of this Conflict of Interest in either report, so as the situation stands, Koopman and Knuckey were advising the Australian Government on the sustainable harvesting of sharks, at the same time they were advising Cathay Pacific Airways on how fins of the same sharks could be sustainably exploited. This is a clear case of an undisclosed Conflict of Interest.

Another undisclosed potential Conflict of Interest

Dr. Knuckley is also Chairman of Geelong Food Co-Products Cluster (GFCC), whose affiliated companies include many from the commercial fishery and seafood sectors and whose achievements include helping small food producers gain access to Asian markets through Austrade support as part of the Asian Century Business Engagement Program[Source: Geelong Food Co-producers Cluster. <http://gfcc.com.au/>].

We fail to understand how the Australian Government could seek advice on the sustainable exploitation of shark species from a scientist who is the Chairman of a group which represents amongst others the commercial fishery and seafood business sectors and who therefore has a vested interest in ensuring that shark stocks are made available for commercial exploitation by GFCC group members. This surely also comprises an undisclosed Conflict of Interest. Furthermore, in terms of ethics, doesn't this give GFCC a potential unfair business advantage over its competitors, if its Chairman is advising the government on the sustainable harvesting of sharks and his group members on commercial fishery and seafood opportunities.

Summary

Sea Shepherd demands a full investigation be undertaken into these issues and until they have been investigated, no CITES export certificates for any of the 5 shark species listed on CITES Appendix II should be issued by CITES Australia.

Submitted for your investigation. We look forward to hearing your findings.

Yours sincerely

Gary Stokes
Director - Asia
Sea Shepherd Global

cc. Mr John Scanlon - Secretary General CITES Secretariat
Department of the Environment, Australia
Austrade
IATA
Cathay Pacific Airways