



**New senator bills in Palau suggest to re-introduce shark finning and to levy export tax from tuna fishing**

*Sustainable tourism highly threatened*

**Koror/Palau, Munich/Germany – Thursday, April 9, 2009.** With the recent change of Palau's government that includes an almost entirely new Senate, there are indications that Palau's environment is of lesser concern than the interests of influential foreign fishing companies.

Newly elected Senators Paul W. Ueki and Joel Toribiong have submitted bills SB 8-44 and SB 8-50 (March 26, 2009) to the government. Bill SB 8-44 requests a change to the strong shark protection laws that are in place in Palau due to strong environmental protective efforts of former president Tommy J. Remengesau. In 2004, Sharkproject recognized Palau as their very first Shark Guardian of the Year Award recipient for a passage of legislation that banned foreign fishing vessels from having onboard any part of any shark, turtle or ray at any time for any reason whether dead or alive. It was a landmark piece of legislation in the fight to protect sharks that came about as a result of the leadership and strong support of then President Tommy Remengesau Jr. (an avid scuba diver himself) who proclaimed that "Palau's environment is its economy" and refused to bend to the will of foreign fishing companies. Bill SB 8-50 suggests to eliminate taxes on tuna fishing over a period of five years. Senators Ueki and Toribiong are politically aligned and it now appears that both are openly in support of commercial fishing in Palau's waters as indicated by the respective legislation introduced.

An alleged purpose/benefit of SB 8-44 is to generate revenue and or tax income for Palau to the benefit of the Palauan people yet SB 8-50 removes the liability for taxes and allows fish to be off-loaded in a foreign port, thereby denying Palau and the Palauan people of those benefits supposed revenues. The net effect if the proposed bills pass is that foreign fishing companies can and will fish for sharks, will vacuum the ocean bare of tuna and tuna-like species, won't have to pay export taxes on fish, and Palau's law enforcement agencies will be stripped of the tools needed to successfully prosecute violators in court. These two proposed pieces of legislation are a gift horse to foreign fishing companies and



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meanwhile expose Palau and the Palauan people to the very real potential destruction of their fisheries and their tourism industry and yet it remains unclear what off-setting benefit will result from passage of these bills.

Dermot Keane, Managing Director of Sam's Tours Palau comments: "Palau's tourism industry is the only sustainable industry presently established in Palau and which underpins the entire nation's economy. Scuba diving is the very backbone of that industry and permitting and encouraging unsustainable fisheries practice and particularly the taking of sharks poses a very significant threat not only to Palau's sharks but also to Palau's scuba diving and tourism industry. It is clear that a sustainable tourism industry and unsustainable commercial fisheries practices are incompatible and opposing forces. Sam's Tours is strongly opposed to these latest threats to Palau's tourism industry and is fully committed to supporting the efforts of Belau Tourism Association, Palau Chamber of Commerce, Palau Visitors Authority and other groups to maintain Palau's strong stance against unsustainable fishing practices including the killing of sharks. In 2009 with the body of knowledge available to the contrary, I believe it is absolutely reckless to propose that Palau profits from unsustainable fishing practices while at the same time expecting to maintain a robust tourism industry. I don't believe it is possible and I know that scuba divers will shun Palau as a dive destination if this legislation passes into law. It is a matter of economic survival that Palau's strong environmental laws remain in force. I therefore urge each and every person to speak out against the proposed destruction of sharks in Palau by writing to each of the following agencies who are fighting to protect Palau's sharks:

Belau Tourism Association: [bta@palaunet.com](mailto:bta@palaunet.com)

Palau Chamber of Commerce: [pcoc@palaunet.com](mailto:pcoc@palaunet.com)

Palau Visitors Authority: [pva@visit-palau.com](mailto:pva@visit-palau.com)

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