

## **Oceanblue Divers host benefit for SRI AND launch campaign to end consumption of shark in New York City**

On May 9, Oceanblue Divers, New York City's largest and fastest-growing dive club, hosted an exclusive screening of the award-winning documentary *Sharkwater* to benefit the Shark Research Institute. The sold-out event, held at the AMC E-Walk Theater in Times Square, also featured presentations by Rob Stewart, Director of *Sharkwater*, Dean Fessler of SRI, and Michael Feld, founder of Oceanblue Divers, plus an after party with open bar at Home, a Chelsea nightclub.



At the same time, Oceanblue Divers launched a campaign to end the consumption of sharks and sharkfin soup throughout New York City.

Shark finning is the brutal practice of catching sharks, slicing off their fins and dumping the live sharks back in the ocean to drown or bleed to death. Although shark fins are tasteless and laden with high levels of toxic methyl-mercury, shark fin soup costs as much as \$100 per bowl, making it a status symbol in some Asian cultures, and the high demand for shark fins by Asian markets drives a shadowy multi-billion dollar industry second in size only to the illegal drug trade.

“Until relatively recently, poachers hunted elephants for their tusks, leaving the rest of the animal to rot,” said Feld. “Worldwide outcry, conservation efforts and enforcement brought elephants back from the edge of extinction. We can only hope that the world will wake up and save sharks.”

Oceanblue Divers seeks to:

- *Raise awareness about threats to sharks.* Sharks have inhabited the earth's oceans for 400 million years, but overfishing in the last 20 years has decimated some shark populations by as much as 90%.
- *Reduce demand for shark fins through education.* The demand for shark fin soup is at an all-time high, but consumers are largely unaware of the origins of shark fin and have little understanding of overfishing, illegal shark finning or the health hazards associated with shark fin soup.
- *End the practice of shark finning globally.* The high profit margins of illegal shark finning (a multi-billion dollar industry) have pushed fishermen into fragile marine reserves, such as the Galapagos Islands and Costa Rica's Cocos Island.
- *Promote ecology-based tourism as viable economic alternatives to shark finning.* Tourism dollars from scuba divers and other travelers interested in observing sharks in their natural habitat can infuse far more money into communities over the long term than short-term gains from shark fishing.

The first objective of the campaign is to seek a ban on consumption of shark fin soup in New York City. One of the first steps to achieve this goal is an educational presence at the Taiwanese street fair to be held Sunday May 20, noon to 5 pm at 17th Street and Park Avenue (Union Square Park North), and SRI members in Manhattan are encouraged to assist. Also planned is a web site to list NYC locations that sell shark products; and engaging the office of the Mayor to become an official supporter of the campaign.

The Animal Welfare Institute has also posted a list of restaurants selling shark fin soup in the Washington, D.C. area. They ask SRI members in the area to contact the restaurants and ask them to remove the dishes from their menu — and tell them why. To view the AWI list, go to:

[http://www.awionline.org/oceans/news/DC\\_restaurants\\_shark-finsoup.htm](http://www.awionline.org/oceans/news/DC_restaurants_shark-finsoup.htm)