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Meeting Discusses Shark-Feeding Tour Ban

Tour Operator Refutes Stance That Sharks Became More Aggressive

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HONOLULU -- A shark task force met with the Hawaii Kai community Tuesday night to get feedback on a proposal to ban shark-feeding tours. Noticeably absent were shark tour operators.

State Rep. Gene Ward is aiming to tighten an existing state law that makes it illegal to feed sharks in state waters.

Shark tour companies say the proposal is anti-business. Fishermen say shark tours are taking big bites out of their business.

Ahjmat Ali has been fishing in Maunalua Bay for years. He said he has noticed a drastic change in shark behavior in the last two years.

"They're aggressive, they're coming at the boat to look for fish, anything they can feed on," Ali said.

Commercial fisherman Dennis Kamikawa said sharks bite into 50 percent of his catch.

"By the time its halfway up, they just eat it," Kamikawa said. "Gone. So, that's part of my pocket."

Neither man said they necessarily support a complete ban on shark tours.

"The feeding shouldn't be allowed. They could go and look at the sharks," Ali said.

The discussion on the tours continued at a shark task force meeting.

Ward said he is crafting legislation that would add more bite to current state law.

"We're tightening it up because right now, there's been no enforcement," Ward said. "It's loosely constructed and the state has a little slap on the wrist."

Ward said his proposal more specifically bans shark feeding for commercial purposes. Penalties are also stiffer.

Under current state law, first time violators are fined \$100.

Ward's proposal calls for \$147,000 fine per incident.

There were no shark tour operators at this meeting, but North Shore Shark Adventures sent KITV video it said proves sharks do not follow tour boats back to shore. They said the video proves that the sharks remain at the tour site and swim toward the deep water.

The company also said its tours are safe and good for the economy. Tour operators said they serve

about 40,000 tourists a year in Hawaii.

Ward said he plans to introduce the ban on shark feeding tours when the next legislative session begins in January.

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