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## **Oceanblue Divers Launches Anti-Shark Finning Campaign With Screening of Documentary *Sharkwater***

May 9, 2007, New York, NY—Oceanblue Divers, New York City’s largest and fastest-growing dive club, is launching a comprehensive campaign to stop the practice of shark finning and increase public awareness of the plight of sharks worldwide. Working closely with Rob Stewart (director and star of *Sharkwater*) and with the support of the Shark Research Institute, Oceanblue Divers will kick off the campaign by hosting a benefit screening of *Sharkwater*, an award-winning documentary that illuminates the plight of sharks worldwide and exposes the corruption in the shark fishing industry.

*Sharkwater* premiered to record box-office numbers in Canada, and will be released in U.S. theaters in October 2007. To date, the film has already won 15 awards worldwide, and is poised to become for the marine conservation movement what *An Inconvenient Truth* became for the global warming crisis. With the support of Stewart, Oceanblue Divers hopes to capitalize on the film’s expected popularity to increase awareness of the destructive practice of shark finning.

Shark finning is the practice of catching sharks, slicing off their fins and dumping the finless-but-still-live shark back in the ocean, where it drowns or bleeds to death. This type of shark fishing is illegal, but high demand and even higher profits combined with a lack of enforcement drives this multi-billion dollar industry. Though shark fins are tasteless and laden with high levels of toxic methyl-mercury, shark fin soup costs as much as US\$100 per bowl, making it a symbol of status and wealth in some Asian cultures.

The first goal of Oceanblue Divers' anti-shark finning campaign will be to seek a ban on the consumption of shark fin soup in New York City. Steps to achieve this goal include an educational presence at a Taiwanese street fair later this month; a Web site to collect data on NYC locations that sell shark products; and engaging the office of the Mayor to become an official supporter of the campaign.

“Until relatively recently, poachers hunted elephants for their tusks, leaving the rest of the animal to rot,” said Oceanblue Divers founder Michael 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 the sharks before it’s too late, even if sharks don’t have the same cuddly image in the public consciousness.”

With this campaign against shark finning, 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 percent. No sharks are protected internationally, and only a handful of countries manage shark fisheries.
- 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 sustainable management of shark populations. More than 100 million sharks are killed each year, with as much as 50 percent caught as unintentional “bycatch.” Sharks are highly vulnerable to overexploitation due to their longevity, late maturity and slow reproduction rates. Furthermore, the loss of apex predators like sharks wreaks havoc across the ecosystems they inhabit. Sustainable management provides a balance between conservation and the fishing industry.

- Promote ecology-based tourism and scuba diving as a viable economic alternative to shark finning. Tourism dollars from scuba divers and other travelers interested in observing sharks in their natural habitat can ultimately infuse more money into communities over the long term than short-term gains from shark fishing.

Oceanblue Divers will officially launch this campaign at the benefit screening of *Sharkwater* on May 9. A Q&A discussion following the film will provide an opportunity for questions about this campaign as well as about the film, with filmmaker Rob Stewart, Shark Research Institute representatives and other shark experts in attendance.

**About Oceanblue Divers** (<http://www.oceanbluedivers.net>):

Oceanblue Divers is a New York City-based dive club dedicated to bringing divers of all experience levels together to enjoy social and educational events, promote conservation of the marine environment, and travel to the best dive destinations on the planet. The group also publishes a blog, The Dive Evangelist, at [www.diveevangelist.com](http://www.diveevangelist.com).

**About *Sharkwater*** (<http://www.sharkwater.com>):

Filmed in visually-stunning high definition, *Sharkwater* takes you into the most shark-rich waters of the world, exposing the exploitation and corruption decimating the world's shark populations and the marine reserves of Costa Rica's Cocos Island and the Galapagos Islands.

**About Shark Research Institute** (<http://www.sharks.org>)

The Shark Research Institute was created to sponsor and conduct research on sharks and promote the conservation of sharks. SRI works to correct misperceptions about sharks and stop the slaughter of 100 million sharks annually.

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