More than 3,000 acres of ocean surrounding Little Water Caye Island in southeastern Belize is being set aside as a sanctuary for whale sharks. The area, known to divers for its gathering of whale sharks, is also an important breeding area for many species of reef fishes. The protected area was set up by a Belize-based organization, Friends of Nature, and is being funded by Conservation International. Dr. Sylvia Earle, Executive Director of Conservation International's Global Marine Programme, welcomed the establishment of the sanctuary as a way of protecting whale sharks but noted that is also an important area for biodiversity. "As we hear stories about the precipitous declines of fish populations around the world it becomes even more critical to protect these unique places," said Earle. "The local communities that founded Friends of Nature were the first to discover the rare whale sharks that congregate in the area and are determined to protect them. By promoting marine education in the local schools and supporting eco-friendly tourism, they have set an example for how conservation, local communities and responsible travel can work in harmony to save the marine environment." explained Costas Christ, Senior Director of Conservation International's Ecotourism Programme. The plan is to work with local communities to develop a sustainable income by eco-friendly tourism, allowing divers to interact with the whale sharks through operators who are committed to avoid disturbance to the animals, with the income from whale shark tourism being used to manage protection of the marine environment.

**New Limits for Atlantic Spiny Dogfish**

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) set next year's fishing limits for overfished spiny dogfish sharks at scientifically defensible levels. A record number of conservationists, scientists, divers, aquarists and other citizens attended the Commission's meeting in New York and spoke in favor of conserving the sharks. Public support helped persuade a majority of the voting states to reject proposals for excessive fishing limits championed by state officials from Massachusetts and North Carolina.

Last February, the ASMFC adopted a Massachusetts proposal to set the dogfish quota for the 2003 fishing year at double the level recommended by scientists and to allow the limit per trip to exceed technical recommendations by an order of magnitude. Massachusetts fishermen, primarily from Cape Cod, are responsible for nearly 80 percent of the total U.S. Atlantic dogfish landings. Excessive ASMFC dogfish limits undermined federal dogfish recovery efforts, negotiations with Canada regarding the same population, and the U.S. leadership role in international shark conservation initiatives. The higher allowances in state waters resulted in driving dogfish fisheries closer to shore, increasing the risk for incidental capture of bottlenose dolphins, sea turtles and...
Atlantic sturgeon.

Dogfish, like other sharks, are especially susceptible to overfishing because they grow slowly, mature late, and produce few young. Female spiny dogfish produce only six pups on average after a two-year gestation period. Dogfish fisheries target large, mature females based on market demand. Lax limits on this practice have led to a 75 percent decline in reproductive females and virtually no offspring for the last seven years. The new science-based limits take effect May 1, 2004. Damage to the population is expected to take several decades to repair.

The motion to set science-based limits was proposed by a representative from New York and supported by Maine, Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Representatives from North Carolina, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire supported much higher limits, contrary to overwhelming scientific advice. Florida abstained from the vote, while New Jersey issued a "null" vote. Delaware representatives were absent. Sonja Fordham

Mark Your Calendars

• Planning to attend Adventure Expo on January 10 & 11, 2004, at the Jacob Javits Center in New York city? If so, please stop by Booth #669 and visit with SRI staff & volunteers. Admission to the show is $15, but SRI members that register online (www.adventureexpo.com) and use the promotional code (SHAR) receive a discount.
• Dean Fessler, SRI Education Director, will be the guest speaker at the Philadelphia Chapter of the Explorers Club on January 15, 2004 at Independence Hall. His topic: White Sharks of South Africa.
• SRI will also have a booth at the London International Dive Show at Excel, Docklands, March 27 & 28, 2004. Directions & show hours are available at: www.diveshows.co.uk
• Beneath The Sea is the largest consumer dive show in America. The show, held at the Meadowlands Convention Center in Secaucus, NJ from March 26 though 28, 2004, features seminars, workshops, parties, special events, photo contest, a spectacular film show and exhibits by hundreds of manufacturers and organizations. Register online at www.beneaththesea.org.

Pregnant White Shark caught in NZ

From photographs of the shark, which was caught in a set net, Department of Conservation scientist Clint Duffy said the shark appeared to be at least 6m. This is only the second pregnant great white caught off New Zealand's coast. Fishermen saved two pups by caesarian section. Marine biologist Peter Crabb said the mother's death was a tragedy that could have been avoided by banning set-netting in near-shore areas.
SRI’s whale shark tagging programs have enabled tracking the movements of individual sharks: Satellite telemetry provides real-time tracking information and visual ID tags confirm travel of tagged individuals from one area to another. Another tool used to track and identify individual animals is photography. Valuable information about the biology, ecology and global movements of whale sharks can be gained by re-identifying individuals. However, the recognition of individual sharks relies on photographing specific areas of the shark’s body: The gill area and first dorsal fin. The patterns on the right side of the animal differ from that on the left, so both sides should be photographed.

Since 1995, divers have been reporting sightings of whale sharks to SRI and the same year SRI member Brad Norman began cataloguing individual whale sharks at Ningaloo Reef, Australia. Last year another SRI member, Jason Holmberg, developed digital image recognition software to assist in the re-identification of catalogued whale sharks. We urge all members to continue to report sightings of whale sharks and send any photos of whale sharks to marie@sharks.org. There are areas of the world where the sharks are not protected and all locational data for images taken in those areas will be deleted by SRI before placing them online, but photographers supplying images to the catalogue will be notified when and where matches occur.

SRI is very grateful for the continued encouragement and support of:

- Amphibico
- C2 Educational Expeditions
- Freeman Foundation
- Galapagos Adventures
- Great White Shark Adventures
- Interdata
- JBL Enterprises Inc.
- Microwave Telemetry, Inc.
- Ocean Rover Cruises
- Pelican Products
- Project AWARE Foundation
- The Philanthropic Group
- Underwater Video Images
SRI Welcomes New Trustees

Two new Trustees were elected to our Board at the November meeting: Stephen Nageiwicz and Elizabeth Murdock. Please join us in welcoming these two outstanding individuals to SRI's Board of Trustees.

Stephen Nageiwicz is multi-talented; he is a columnist, recognized by the Explorers Club as Explorer of the Year 2000, owns and operates the Diversion II, and is a USCG licensed Captain for commercial diving and oceanographic projects. “I am proud to become a member of the Institute and look forward to lending my expertise, resources and help to growing the SRI,” said Nageiwicz. As Executive Director of the Explorers Club, he developed and managed their annual operating budget and endowment funds, successfully recruiting many major corporate sponsors and patrons. Currently, he is the Facility Manager of the James J. Howard Marine Sciences Laboratory at Sandy Hook NJ and manages the operations of marine sciences and oceanography labs for the State of NJ, coordinating operations with six major research organizations.

Elizabeth Murdock specializes in endangered species conservation, focusing on both domestic and international environmental issues, and she has designed and implemented successful public education, advocacy, and on-the-ground conservation initiatives for numerous imperiled species, including sharks. As manager of WildAid's Shark Conservation Program, Murdock worked alongside SRI to secure the Appendix II listings for whale sharks and basking sharks at CITES in 2002, and she also ran a national high-profile endangered species campaign at the National Wildlife Federation. Said Murdock, “I am excited to help build SRI and to contribute toward SRI's critical efforts in shark conservation.” She holds a degree in Humanities from Yale University, and is currently Executive Director of the Golden Gate Audubon Society in Berkeley, California.

Expedition Announcement

Dean Fessler will be leading an expedition to South Africa 17-26 August 2004 to document white shark behavior and record their aerial displays. The expedition team will meet with Dr. Leonard Compagno, Director of SRI, and work with local researchers. The expedition is land-based and daily observations of the sharks will be made from the boat (a cage is also available for underwater observations). Divers and non-divers may apply for spaces on this expedition. The cost per participant is $3495 and only a limited number people will be selected for the team. Post-expedition safaris to game parks or Mozambique can also be arranged.