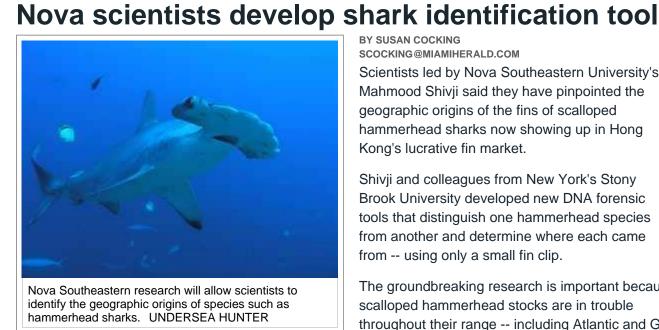


Posted on Sunday, 12.06.09

SHARK OVERHARVESTING

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BY SUSAN COCKING SCOCKING@MIAMIHERALD.COM

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Scientists led by Nova Southeastern University's Mahmood Shivji said they have pinpointed the geographic origins of the fins of scalloped hammerhead sharks now showing up in Hong Kong's lucrative fin market.

Shivji and colleagues from New York's Stony Brook University developed new DNA forensic tools that distinguish one hammerhead species from another and determine where each came from -- using only a small fin clip.

The groundbreaking research is important because scalloped hammerhead stocks are in trouble throughout their range -- including Atlantic and Gulf waters in the United States -- while commanding

high prices in Hong Kong.

The U.S. government has proposed the scalloped hammerhead and five other shark species for listing under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which would greatly restrict the legal fin trade. Shivji says his research would help management and enforcement efforts.

Shiviji, who heads the Guy Harvey Research Institute and Save Our Seas Shark Center at Nova, says his team used a technique called ``genetic stock identification" to trace scalloped hammerheads from the Western Atlantic to three distinct stocks -- northern (U.S. Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico); central (Belize and

Panama); and southern (Brazil). The three groups, Shivji said, do not mix -- making them especially vulnerable to overfishing.

``If a stock gets wiped out, there is no replacement," Shivji said. ``Without somebody keeping track of it, you could completely wipe out an entire genetic stock."

The new CSI-like technique also might be applied to great hammerhead, smooth hammerhead, dusky, oceanic whitetip, tiger, porbeagle, bull and gray reef sharks -- all of which are found in the Hong Kong fin trade.

The study builds upon a previous DNA test developed in 2005 at the Guy Harvey Research Institute that allows scientists to distinguish among great, scalloped and smooth hammerheads from fin or meat tissues.



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