

June 4, 2008

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Department of the House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To whom it may concern:

On behalf of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), I am writing in support of the current Appendix II listing of *Pristis microdon* as agreed to by Australia, the United States and a majority of the Parties at the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (The Hague, Netherlands, June 3-15, 2007). The limited, legal export of *P. microdon* for public display under this Appendix II listing will enable professional public aquariums throughout the world to educate hundreds of millions of people about the importance of this unique species, and to generate public support for its conservation and the conservation of all nature.

AZA is a non-profit organization dedicated to building North America's largest wildlife conservation movement. AZA is America's leading accrediting organization for zoos and aquariums, and admits only those institutions meeting rigorous standards. There are currently more than 2,500 animal exhibitors licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the United States alone. Yet, only 218 zoos and aquariums have met AZA's strict accreditation standards to become members of the Association, and are therefore the premier zoological parks and aquariums in North America. Accreditation involves a thorough review and inspection process which examines all aspects of an institution's operation, including the animal collection, veterinary care, physical facilities, quarantine procedures, safety, security, finance, staff, governing authority, support organization, education programs, conservation and research.

With 160 million visitors to 218 accredited zoos and aquariums, AZA's focus on connecting people and animals provides a critical link to helping animals in their native habitats. AZA-accredited institutions teach more than 12 million people each year in living classrooms, and have provided training to more than 400,000 teachers. Far-reaching conservation programs have provided support to 3,693 field conservation and research projects in more than 100 countries. For these accredited public institutions, every visit to their living collections, including sawfish, provides critical support for an important conservation mission.

In a recent Harris Interactive Poll, 97 percent of respondents agreed that aquariums are important in educating the public about marine animals they might not otherwise have the chance to see. That same poll found that 96 percent of respondents felt that aquariums provide people with valuable information about the importance of oceans, waters and the animals that live here and 86 percent of respondents believe that visiting zoos and aquariums encourages people to donate time and/or money to conservation.

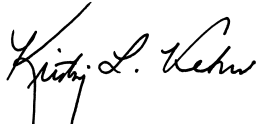
AZA-accredited aquariums can contribute significantly to sawfish conservation through broad-based research activities, including field research and government assistance with genetics studies. AZA member institutions are already assisting premier U.S. research laboratories studying sawfishes with field research programs throughout Florida. These programs, in addition to attempting to breed sawfish, include continuous monitoring of behavior, environmental data, blood samples and other advanced medical procedures like sonography and endrochronology. In addition, AZA member institutions recently assisted the U.S. federal government by obtaining sawfish tissue samples from eight individual animals from three different species to aid in the development of genetic testing techniques specifically to help identify sawfish parts to the species level in international trade.

A recent survey indicates that sawfishes of four different species (three of which are Australian) and 62 specimens are on display at 29 different institutions in 12 countries. The numbers are not large but the difference they make for conservation will be immeasurable. If public aquariums, as scientific institutions, do not have access to these animals, the fate of all sawfish will be left to however they exist today in the wild. We will know no more about the secret lives of the species than we do today. And, given their declines over the last decade, it is not far fetched to believe that what we discover through our research may make a significant contribution to their survival.

In summary, the professional zoo and aquarium community takes great pride in our ability engage millions of visitors to care more and do more for the conservation of nature. We also believe that, as it relates specifically to sawfish, the conservation community should take full advantage of the high quality animal care and cutting-edge conservation science underway within these institutions. Restricting the limited access of *P. microdon* for public display based solely on incorrect data would needlessly negate this unique opportunity.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment on this important issue. Should you have any questions about my comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristin L. Vehrs". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'K'.

Kristin L. Vehrs
Executive Director