



**SUBMISSION No.11  
TT on 12 March 2008**

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties  
Department of House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
By Email:jsct@aph.gov.au

Thursday, 5 June 2008

To whom it may concern,

**Letter of support for Cairns Marine in response to the Humane Society International submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties regarding 2007 Amendments to Appendices I and II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.**

The Australasian Natural History Unit (ANHU) produces scientific, environmental and natural history films for the international market with such clients as Discovery Channel, National Geographic, BBC and NHK Japan. Many of these films have won international awards including an Emmy nomination. ANHU has the largest library of high definition natural history stock vision in the southern hemisphere. ANHU is currently producing a 20-part television series on the Great Barrier Reef for BBC Children's and a landmark 2-hour shark conservation documentary about the status of shark research in Australia for Discovery Channel's 'Shark Week' - to be aired in July 2008.

The Shark Week documentary outlines the research being conducted in the Coral Sea and on the Great Barrier Reef by the Australasian Natural History Unit. The ANHU and Discovery Channel have directly funded more than \$150,000 dollars worth of electronic tagging equipment and have successfully deployed the first ever radio-tracking array around Osprey Reef in the Coral Sea. The data from these research projects is central to World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Coral Sea campaign, which aims to have the Coral Sea

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declared as a multi-use Marine Protected Area (MPA). The tracking project is focused on determining the home ranges of white tip reef sharks, grey reef sharks and silver tip sharks as well as manta rays and potato cod.

To assist with this research program Cairns Marine Aquarium Fish (CM), a professional marine exporter, supplied staff and equipment on a number of expeditions to enable the safe collection of specimens for tagging.

CM's considerable expertise has been critical to the success of the tagging program, and has been supplied to the expedition at no charge. This type of support for research and conservation is regularly provided by CM and demonstrates their commitment to research and education.

In the past month CM has supplied expertise and specimens for macro filming in the ANHU marine studio for 'Oceans', the largest marine conservation film ever to be produced. This \$60 million film, produced by French production company Galatee Films, will be released in cinemas worldwide in 2009 and has the full support of the International Census of Marine Life.

ANHU has also worked with CM in documenting their support for education and research of sawfish over the past five years. In 2007 ANHU produced a one-hour documentary for ARTE (France and Germany) about CM's sawfish collection and research. This was the highest rating documentary in the 12-month period for ARTE – one of the largest cable channels in Europe. We are currently reworking this film for broadcast on Australian television networks.

In the course of producing this documentary, our crew joined CM on a number of expeditions to Cape York over a three-year period. During this time we witnessed first hand the dedication CM has to the long-term survival of sawfish species. Due to the difficult nature and risks involved in documenting the natural behaviour of sawfish in the wild (never previously achieved by any film crew in the world), CM supplied a sawfish to ANHU to be filmed in a specially constructed aquarium facility. The high definition video and still images achieved during this time are in heavy demand for use in documentaries, many of which highlight the plight of the species.

Currently CM is allowed to collect a limited number of sawfish under Appendix II "for the exclusive purpose of allowing international trade in live animals to appropriate and acceptable aquaria for primarily conservation purposes". It is our belief that CM goes above and beyond the principles outlined in this annotation. By allowing these animals to be documented on high resolution video, the number of people exposed to sawfish worldwide will be a magnitude of order larger than those people who learn about sawfish in captivity. A typical international documentary release is viewed by over 100 million people.

CM runs educational excursions for school groups in the Cairns areas to expose children to the local marine environment and local conservation challenges.



This is further demonstrated by CM's support and commitment to the publication, sale and promotion of the children's book 'Sonja the Sawfish' - proceeds from which are fed back into sawfish research.

ANHU is in the final stages of establishing a not-for-profit fund called the Marine Animal Tracking Fund – in collaboration with CM, James Cook University Tropical Australian Stinger Research Unit, and the Sea Turtle Foundation. The aim is to pool together funds gained from both corporate and private donations to fund essential research into the movement patterns of tropical marine species. CM is dedicated to having a component running within this fund referred to as 'Sawfish Central' to facilitate the leverage of financial support from public aquaria and other resources for sawfish research.

We believe the research that CM is supporting in terms of access and expertise in the capture of sawfish is absolutely critical for the survival of sawfish species. These species inhabit inshore waters with low visibility that shields them from view. They are an extremely difficult species to do work on and very limited funding is currently available. Without knowledge of basic biological data such as growth rates and movement patterns this species cannot be successfully monitored and conserved. Without public exposure to sawfish in public aquaria and through the media, I believe that there is little hope for their survival. Cairns Marine's commitment to research and education on sawfish and many other marine species should be applauded. They show a level of dedication to the sustainable use of the marine environment far exceeding that shown by any other private enterprise that we have ever encountered.

**The Australasian Natural History Unit does NOT recommend that Australia propose the up listing of *Pristis microdon* \*Freshwater sawfish from Appendix II to Appendix I, without any annotation, to the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP15), scheduled to take place in mid 2010.**

If you have any need for more information do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Richard Fitzpatrick  
Director / Shark researcher  
Australasian Natural History Unit

