

OPEN LETTER TO COLUMBIA PICTURES FROM MEMBERS OF THE MARINE SCIENCE RESEARCH COMMUNITY

The Shallows promulgates scientifically unfounded fear of sharks and contributes to the decline of many already at-risk and ecologically important shark species.

Dear Columbia Pictures,

We are writing in response to your upcoming movie *The Shallows*. This movie is being touted as “*Jaws* for a new generation”, a reference to the 1975 Steven Spielberg thriller about a vengeful, man-eating great white shark that terrorizes a local community. While this reference no doubt works well to launch *The Shallows*, it is also a reference that deeply concerns us in the marine science community given the precarious state of global shark populations.

Recent studies estimate that approximately 100 million sharks are killed globally per year – that’s over 10,000 sharks killed per hour. Over a quarter of the species that comprise the broader classification of sharks have been classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as Threatened – this is substantially greater than for other similar groups of animals.

Increases in shark mortality have been directly linked to media mischaracterization of sharks. After *Jaws* was released, for example, public imagination and curiosity for sharks was perversely transformed into a fear that this assemblage of species are universally oversized, bloodthirsty, and vengeful killers. This mischaracterization spawned interest in popularizing recreational killing of sharks and bred apathy amongst the public regarding spikes in shark mortality associated with the global shark fin trade and bycatch of sharks in the commercial fishing industry. Peter Benchley, author of the novel *Jaws* and co-writer of the screenplay for the movie reacted to this biologically misguided staining of public opinion by stating: “Knowing what I know now, I could never write that book today.”

We too are concerned that *The Shallows* may turn the tide in public opinion for a new generation of ocean lovers that have come to appreciate sharks as awe-inspiring, majestic, and ecologically important animals. Far from being the serial man-eaters as portrayed in this film, in reality, shark attacks are exceptionally rare and humans are not prey for the vast majority of shark species. In fact the risk of being attacked by a shark has dropped precipitously. In California, for example, the risk of being attacked has dropped by 91 percent over the last six decades. Surfers in California presently have a 1 in 17 million chance of being bitten by a shark – your odds are higher of winning the lottery.

We in the marine research community feel it is imperative to continue fostering new generations’ appreciation and wonder for these diverse and beautiful animals that play an important role in the healthy functioning of the ocean communities.

Acknowledging the responsibility and willingness of the film community to positively shape the future of our oceans, we respectfully ask that Columbia Pictures help stand with the marine research community to share information on the at-risk status of many shark populations and elevate a more scientifically informed view of their importance to the oceans and an honest view of the risk they pose to coastal populations. To help advance this message we respectfully ask that Columbia pictures donate 2% of their profits from *The Shallows* to create a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation fund to support shark research and conservation and foster awareness of global shark declines.

We thank you for your consideration of this request and sincerely hope you will take this opportunity to constructively manage the impact of this film.

Sincerely,

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