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Testimony on behalf of Joseph Gilbert

Before the Environment Committee

In support of SB 226 - AN ACT AUTHORIZING DUAL LANDINGS OF FISH IN THE STATE.

And

In opposition to HB 5251 - AN ACT PROHIBITING THE POSSESSION AND TRADE OF SHARK FINS

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony SB 226, a proposal that we believe will have a positive impact on Connecticut's CT fishermen and the economy.

This proposal would increase safety and create efficiencies for fishermen from CT and from surrounding states. Currently, CT fishermen must make a separate trip to sea for each state it holds a license for and then return to that state to land their catch. This bill would allow CT fisherman to go to sea once and then land successively in each state they hold permits from on their return trip to their homeport. This would reduce the three trips to one and thereby result in massive fuel savings for the fishermen in addition to reducing CO2 emissions. Additionally, less time at sea is less exposure to the dangers inherent to fishing and thus increases the safety for our fishermen. There is an added incentive that out of state fisherman may purchase fuel and goods here in Connecticut and the current law keeps revenue out of the state and in the economy of our neighboring states. This is a common sense proposal that will provide some economic relief to the struggling CT fleet, keep fishermen safer and the environment cleaner, all while not increasing the overall amount of fish landed.

HB 5251

While I believe I understand the intent of this bill, I would like to testify against HB 5251 as written. The bill is too vague and could be interpreted to potentially shut down a legal fishery in CT for Dog Shark for which CT fishermen have a quota. The practice of shark finning is not a problem in the state of Connecticut and is already banned under federal law. As drafted this bill states that "Any person who possesses, sells, offers for sale, trades or distributes any shark fin shall be fined not more than two thousand dollars or imprisoned not more 4 than one year, or both." This ambiguous language is without definitions and will likely create legal misinterpretation where 'every-day' fishermen, fishing legally and ethically, may be subject to citation and arrest if they catch a legal shark.

The illegal practice of shark finning is a problem in the waters of countries outside of US waters and we certainly do not want CT to become a haven for the trade in illegal fins. However, this bill should be rewritten to protect fishermen and legal fishing practices while still properly addressing the illegal market trade in shark fins.

Joseph Gilbert appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 226 & HB 5251.