



# FISH DEFENDER

## CONCEPT NOTE

Fish Defender is a new marine wildlife protection organization advancing bold, aggressive strategies to achieve tangible policy results. Our mission is to change society and law to recognize fish as wildlife and defend their habitats and lives.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

- Led an effort successfully [banning shark fishing on Miami Beach](#); circulating a petition, writing the legislation, and securing unanimous bipartisan support Feb 2026
- Published a [public records investigation](#) revealing thousands of endangered sharks and rays permitted for aquarium capture in Florida Dec 2025
- Collaborated in the movement to introduce and amend the Florida [MANTA Act](#), banning the capture of listed endangered and threatened species for aquarium exhibition Jan 2026
- Collected [over 300 letters](#) to stop the federal SHARKED Act, a bill opening the door to revive commercial shark longlining Sep 2025
- Published a [shark defender toolkit](#) with resources to emulate our winning strategy to ban shark fishing at the local level Feb 2026
- Offered strategic support for the movement to [designate a marine protected area](#) off South Beach, Miami Apr 2025
- Worked with local officials and enforcement officers to successfully [abate illegal fishing](#) on Miami beaches and jetties ongoing
- Removed hundreds of feet of fishing lines and dozens of hooks from the ocean, documenting the process in [online videos](#)
- Began compiling a [global database](#) of 'fish-friendly' dive centers that don't run hunting or feeding charters, including over 100 participants and counting ongoing
- Consulting and aiding grassroots movements in Texas, New York, and municipalities across Florida to ban land-based shark fishing ongoing

## FOUNDER



Spencer Roberts is an environmental journalist and PhD student at the University of Miami, published in outlets such as [Science Advances](#) and [The Intercept](#), conducting [research](#) to advance the mission of the organization and working pro bono.

# CONCEPT

Build the capacity of the organization to advance marine wildlife protection policy with one administrator and one legal fellow, centered around an organized campaign to rapidly replicate our strategy to ban land-based shark fishing at local levels across Florida and state levels in legislatures like New York and California.

Administrator (full-time): \$60K annually

- Cooperate with legislators and organizers to introduce shark fishing bans and other fish protection policies
- Attend public comment periods and policy workshops to advocate for marine wildlife
- Conduct research designed to advance policy goals
- Maintain the organization's website and press releases
- Raise funds through donations, grants, and merchandise
- Direct the organization's social media communications
- Work with enforcement to combat marine life poaching
- Maintain the organization's finances and legal documentation

Legal Fellow (part-time): \$40K annually

- File lawsuits against state regulatory agencies for failing to enforce shark protection regulations
- File lawsuits against charter companies and gear manufacturers engaged in illegal shark fishing
- Disseminate letters to city attorneys clarifying the power of local governments to regulate fishing gear
- File public records requests pursuant to the organization's legal goals and communicate with or sue public records offices to obtain them
- File a lawsuit against NOAA Fisheries for failing to give equal consideration to marine fishes under its responsibility to uphold the Endangered Species Act

General expenses: \$25K annually

- Legal filing fees
- FOIA fees
- Work and travel expenses

**Total: \$125K annually x 2 years = \$250K**

# APPENDIX



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## Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 25, 2026

### **Miami Beach Bans Land-Based Shark Fishing**

— *The measure is intended to prevent potential injuries to beachgoers* —

**Miami Beach, FL** – With millions of visitors who come to soak up the sun and experience the city's 7-miles of pristine beaches each year, the Miami Beach City Commission has voted unanimously to prohibit land-based shark fishing. The measure applies to shark fishing along the shoreline as well as from any dock, bridge or other land-based structure.

"We're targeting heavy-duty fishing equipment that can cause serious injuries to families or anyone who happens to be enjoying our public beach areas," explained **Miami Beach Commissioner Laura Dominguez**, who sponsored the measure.

The ordinance notes that shark carcasses have been discovered along the shores of Miami Beach as well as in neighboring communities as an apparent result of fishing or mishandling sharks.

"We are not only reducing dangerous human-shark interactions in our swimming areas, but also taking a firm stand against the degradation of our vital marine ecosystem," said **Miami Beach Mayor Steven Meiner**. "This is a critical step in ensuring our world-class beaches remain a safe environment for every resident and visitor."

While the primary focus of the ordinance is directed at protecting residents and visitors, the legislation is also intended to prevent the "intentional or negligent capture, injury or killing of sharks within or adjacent to city waters" and to protect endangered marine life and species protected under state law.

Shore-based shark fishing requires the use of long lengths of fishing line and large hooks that can pose injury hazards for swimmers, surfers, waders and other shoreline users.

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*We are committed to providing excellent public service and safety to all who live, work and play in our vibrant, tropical, historic community.*

FEATURED

# Click Bait: The New Shark Poaching Crisis

By Matea Denisen Sep 4, 2025 0 3 min to read

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Spencer Roberts, founder of Fish Defender, and a bull shark.  
Photo by Tanner Mansell



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Across Florida beaches, fishermen armed with drones, stingray bait, and massive reels are targeting sharks for the camera. These videos – often uploaded to TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube – depict anglers dragging varied species of sharks, including the threatened great hammerhead, onto the sand, delaying release to pose for photos.

Even worse, some influencers reframe their actions as “rescues,” editing their content as if they had stumbled upon a stranded animal and heroically intervened. Their only consequence being increased engagement and going viral.

How do you know if the shark-saving content you’re viewing is real? Odds are, it’s probably not. “It’s not common to find sharks stranded on the beach,” said Spencer Roberts, a marine ecologist in the University of Miami’s environmental science and policy department. “So, this idea of coming across a shark stranded on the beach like a dolphin is a misconception.”

The deception doesn’t stop with influencers themselves. Roberts pointed out how automated content accounts remix clips of these land-based shark catches into feel-good montages, often captioned as if a shark had washed ashore and was aided by bystanders.

“People want to see sharks being rescued. The viewers are believing that the animals are being rescued when they’re being deliberately caught and, in many cases, dying as a result of this type of fishing.”