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Subject: Public Hearing Comments

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To: HearingComments, DNREC (MailBox Resources), [REDACTED]

Comments on Docket #2025-R-P-0017 - State Parks Regulations

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Comments:

Comments Regarding Shark Fishing on Delaware Drive-On Fishing Beaches I do not believe limiting shark fishing on Delaware's drive-on fishing beaches is the right direction. In my experience, many of the concerns being raised are addressing a problem that has little or no documented history of occurring. Swimmer Safety The concern that shark fishing endangers swimmers appears to be largely theoretical. Shark anglers typically deploy baits hundreds of yards offshore using kayaks or drones, well beyond where most people are swimming or where other anglers are targeting species within casting distance. In more than five years of shark fishing on Delaware beaches, primarily in Fenwick Island, I have never witnessed a safety incident involving a swimmer. In fact, when a shark is hooked, people are often excited to watch. Landing a Shark Landing a shark is no different from landing any other large fish in one important respect: nearby beach users need to give the angler room to safely land their catch. Whether someone is fighting a shark, striped bass, ray, or bluefish, it is common courtesy—and often required—to avoid interfering with someone who is actively fishing. The purpose of these beaches is fishing. The regulations require visitors to fish in order to access them with a vehicle; they do not require anyone to swim. Shark Anglers Are Active Participants Shark fishing requires a significant investment in equipment, bait, time, and preparation. Shark anglers are often among the only people on the beach who are actively fishing throughout the day. Unfortunately, it is common to see one permitted vehicle transport 10 to 15 people onto the beach. A single rod may be placed in the sand and left untouched all day simply to satisfy the fishing requirement, while the group uses the beach primarily for recreation. Those individuals are often the ones most inconvenienced when they have to temporarily reel in their lines while a fish is being landed. Shark anglers are not the problem. We are actively using the resource as intended, supporting local businesses by purchasing bait, tackle, fuel, food, lodging, and fishing licenses, and participating in Delaware's outdoor heritage. Economic and Tourism Benefits Over the years, I have brought multiple friends to Delaware specifically to experience shark fishing. They purchase Delaware fishing licenses, buy gear and bait locally, spend money at local businesses, and leave with unforgettable memories. Experiences like these encourage tourism and bring repeat visitors back to Delaware's beaches. Education Rather Than Restriction If there are concerns about shark fishing, education is a better solution than prohibition. Florida requires shark anglers to complete a free educational course covering shark identification, ethical fishing practices, and proper handling techniques. I have completed that course, and it was informative without being burdensome. Delaware could also consider a voluntary or required shark-tagging

program in partnership with researchers. Shark anglers could contribute valuable scientific data while becoming active participants in shark conservation and management. The Bigger Picture Based on my own experiences, the strongest opposition to shark fishing rarely comes from active fishermen. It typically comes from people who are using the drive-on beaches primarily for recreation and would prefer there be little or no fishing at all. I have never had another serious angler become upset when I hooked a shark. The complaints almost always come from people who were not actively fishing. That is why I am concerned this proposal is about more than shark fishing. Restricting one legal form of fishing may simply be the first step toward reducing or eliminating fishing opportunities on Delaware's drive-on beaches altogether. Conclusion Shark fishing has been conducted responsibly on Delaware beaches for years. It supports tourism, local businesses, conservation, and outdoor recreation. There is little evidence that it presents a unique public safety risk, and I believe education and responsible fishing practices are far better solutions than additional restrictions. I do not believe limiting shark fishing on Delaware's fishing beaches is in the best interest of anglers, local businesses, or the outdoor traditions that make Delaware's coast unique.