

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2447

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
State Government & Tribal Relations

**Title:** An act relating to designating the bluntnose sixgill shark as the state shark.

**Brief Description:** Designating the state shark.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Reeves, Parshley, Scott, Obras and Donaghy.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

State Government & Tribal Relations: 1/30/26, 2/4/26 [DP].

<p><b>Brief Summary of Bill</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Designates the bluntnose sixgill shark as the official state shark.</li></ul>
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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Mena, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Waters, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chase, Doglio and Farivar.

**Staff:** Desiree Omli (786-7105).

**Background:**

Bluntnose sixgill sharks are one of the oldest species of sharks and are thought to have a prehistoric lineage as they closely resemble fossil forms dating from the Triassic period, which was approximately 200 million years ago. The species can grow up to 18 feet long and has a powerful body with a broad head and small florescent green-blue eyes. The rounded snout is blunt and there are six long gill slits on each side of the head, hence the name "bluntnose sixgill shark," which is distinguishable from the more typical five gill slits

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found in other shark species.

The bluntnose sixgill shark is one of the wider ranging sharks, residing in temperate and tropical seas around the world. This shark is primarily a deepwater species living along outer continental and insular shelves as well as upper slopes of the world's oceans. It rests along the bottom during the day at depths recorded as deep as 6,152 feet, swimming close to the surface or moving into shallow waters at night to feed. Due to its prevalence in deepwater habitat, casual sightings of the bluntnose sixgill shark can be rare and studying them can prove to be difficult. The exception to this is in the Puget Sound where the unique combination of water depth and habitat provides a rich environment for this species. Studies over the past 20 years support the notion that some female bluntnose sixgill sharks return to the Puget Sound to give birth in relatively shallow waters, where their offspring spend their formative years in productive estuaries.

Scientific interest in the bluntnose sixgill sharks of Puget Sound piqued in the late 1990s when recreational divers began encountering a surprising number of these sharks. In 2003 the Seattle Aquarium began studying the bluntnose sixgill shark in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). The number of bluntnose sixgill sharks in the Puget Sound reached a peak between 1999 and 2007, after which the number of sharks suddenly declined with no confirmed explanation. The WDFW classifies the bluntnose sixgill shark as a "species of greatest conservation need" in the State Wildlife Action Plan, which is a comprehensive plan for conserving the state's fish and wildlife and the natural habitats on which they depend. Directed fishing for bluntnose sixgill sharks is not allowed under state fishing regulations and any that are caught accidentally must be released without removing them from the water.

In the last several years, recreational divers have reported a slight increase in the number of bluntnose sixgill sharks spotted in the central Puget Sound waters near Federal Way and Des Moines. The City of Des Moines recently officially declared itself the Sixgill Shark Capital of the World and designated July 6 as Sixgill Shark Day.

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**Summary of Bill:**

Designates the *Hexanchus griseus*, also known as the bluntnose sixgill shark, as the official shark of Washington.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Washington, and specifically Des Moines, is one of the only places in the world where human beings can actually see the bluntnose sixgill shark. These sharks are slow-moving bottom dwellers, which means they are harder to find. However, this species uses the shallower waters of the Puget Sound as a nursery bed for their pups, which provides the rare opportunity to see these sharks closer to the surface. This shark is unique. It is docile, and has six gills instead of five, which most sharks usually have. It is also as big as a school bus, can smash rocks without hurting its fins, and has six rows of teeth. The bluntnose sixgill shark is as old as dinosaurs and lived in the ocean before the Cascades were even hills. This species of shark can live for about 80 years, and have up to 108 babies at one time. They can be found in up to 8,000 feet of water, which is the equivalent of 13 Space Needles stacked on top of each other.

Making the bluntnose sixgill shark the state shark recognizes the important work that the City of Des Moines and researchers are doing around this animal. Sharks face increasing and compounding threats worldwide, and conservative estimates indicate that nearly 70 percent of shark populations have been lost since 1970, largely due to human activity such as shark finning and shark catching. Scientists have known about the bluntnose sixgill shark for only 30 years, which makes it one of the least studied sharks compared to the others. Researchers do not yet understand the impacts that contaminated prey or pollutants have on the sharks themselves, and the amount of uncertainty from a multitude of factors underscores the necessity for increased awareness and recognition of the species. Designating this shark as the state shark could help encourage more science-based education about sharks in Washington.

Recognizing these sharks as the state shark will help to make people feel connected to the species, and when people feel connected, they are naturally more invested in its protection. A state shark will give Washingtonians a new sense of pride in the rich, vibrant ecosystem living just below the surface and provide the opportunity for education about oceanic life. As top predators, sixgills regulate food webs and maintain ecological balance. This shark eats seals, and seals eat salmon. As you well know, we work to protect salmon in this state. By protecting this animal as our state shark, we can also protect salmon. This bill represents more than the designation of a state symbol—it shows Washington's commitment to recognizing and protecting an ecologically significant species in the Puget Sound, and reinforces Washington's leadership in environmental stewardship. Designating this species as the state shark could help in building Washington's reputation as a great place to dive and see sharks, and could in turn boost ecotourism throughout the region.

The sixgill shark is ancient, strong, and unique, just like Washington. Because the bluntnose sixgill shark can be uniquely found and seen in Washington waters, the state

should get to keep it as its state shark—just like the saying "finders keepers."

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Kristine Reeves, prime sponsor; Melissa Gombosky, Sixgill Shark Coalition; Dani Escontrela, Seattle Aquarium; Skippy Shaw; Eleanor Miller; Matt Miller; Anthony Hemstad, City of Des Moines; Mira Leatherman, Student and Shark Enthusiast; Audrey Holloway, Communities for a Healthy Bay; Peter Steelquist, Surfrider Foundation; Gail Cabahug, Puget Soundkeeper; Raymundo Guzman; Reagan Standard; Izabelle Renda; Pritish Kaza; and Samuel Murata.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.