



Branson, Harvey urge ocean conservation

By **Kelsey Jukam** -

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British magnate and philanthropist Sir Richard Branson and marine wildlife artist Guy Harvey discuss ocean conservation at the Cayman Alternative Investment Summit on Friday. - Photos: Kelsey Jukam



British business magnate and philanthropist Sir Richard Branson and marine wildlife artist and conservationist Guy Harvey made an appeal to the audience at the Cayman Alternative Investment Summit on Friday evening to invest in ocean conservation projects.

The two men have collaborated on several marine conservation efforts in the past, including the Caribbean

Challenge Initiative and the Guy Harvey Great Shark Race.

"The vast majority of the seas around the world are not protected, which means you can have massive pillaging going on," Mr. Branson said. "About 20 percent of land is protected with wonderful national parks, whereas only 1 percent of the seas are protected."

Guy Harvey shows one of his paintings to Sir Richard Branson at the summit. Both men champion protection of the marine environment.



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Mr. Branson said the aim of the Caribbean Challenge initiative, launched in 2008, is to get at least 20 percent of the world's marine environments protected by the year 2030. In order to do so, Mr. Harvey said, it is imperative that wealth managers and businesses step forward to assist in protection efforts.



"It all costs money to do the research work, to do the education to effect the conservation, and it's a great way of having another alternative investment ... to invest in nature, invest in conservation. Conservation is good for business," Mr. Harvey said.

The two explained how protecting marine life in the Caribbean is vital to maintaining the tourism industries which are the lifeblood of many Caribbean and Central American countries. In Mexico, for example, diving with whale sharks has become a huge draw for tourists.

"The fisherman now realize that rather than killing them, they can make a lot more money by having tourists swimming with them," Mr. Branson said. "It's just wonderful that finally the fishermen realize that there's more to be made by these lovely species being alive rather than dead."

Mr. Branson, who has dived with several species of sharks, is passionate about protecting them, and sponsored several sharks in Guy Harvey's Great Shark Race. The competition allows businesses and individuals to sponsor and name a shark, which is fitted with a \$4,000 satellite tag that allows researchers and the public to follow a shark's movements over the span of six months. The person whose tagged shark swims the greatest distance, wins.

As it happened, the winner of the 2015 inaugural shark race was sponsored by Virgin United.



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The shortfin mako shark named "Ebenezer" traveled 7,387 miles, racing around the Atlantic Ocean. Unfortunately, two of the other sharks sponsored by Virgin were killed in that six-month time period, and 20 percent of all the makos tagged in the competition were also killed.

According to Mr. Branson, 1.5 million sharks are killed every week around the world for shark fin soup, and that is why he decided to get involved in trying to protect the animals.

"They were in danger of disappearing," Mr. Branson said.

Another species that is in danger of disappearing, and is essential to reef ecosystems, is the Nassau grouper. The biggest spawning aggregation of the species is in Little Cayman, Mr. Harvey explained, thanks to a decade-long effort to protect the fish.

"Cayman should be really proud that you've got this. We would not get this anywhere in the Virgin Islands," Mr. Branson said.

"There needs to be a complete ban on killing the remaining groupers ... so you can get the population up again."

Mr. Branson and Mr. Harvey agreed that education and careful management of marine ecosystems – which requires investments from individuals, businesses and governments – is necessary.

"I think the key is now to make our oceans sustainable, not to destroy them, and to make these sites a thing for future generations to come," Mr. Branson said. "With careful management, there's no reason why we can't do this."

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The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"....Edmund Burke