

The Society for Conservation Biology Marine Section criticises fakumentaries and how scientists are portrayed by the Discovery Channel

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Shark Week is a Discovery Channel's annual weeklong event featuring programming about sharks that has been running for over 25 years. Originally developed to raise awareness and respect for sharks, it is now being highly [criticised](#) due to shows such as "*Megalodon: The Monster Shark Lives*", released in 2013. Through fake, fearmongering evidence, this fakumentary misled the public to believe *Megalodon*, a giant shark that became extinct over 2 million years ago, is still alive and poses a threat to humans. It was the most watched programme in the history of Shark Week. Despite the concerns raised by many, including leading shark scientists and educators, a new fakumentary was released in 2014. "*Megalodon: The New Evidence*" included even more [fabricated evidence](#).

But this was not a first for Discovery Communications. In 2012 Animal Planet's Monster Week featured "*Mermaids: the body found*", a fakumentary that led thousands to believe mermaids do exist, while promoting mistrust towards government agencies. The show included false scientists providing a mix of real scientific discoveries and pseudoscientific theories. Again, despite being highly [criticised](#), two more fakumentaries were released: "*Mermaids: The New Evidence 2013*" and "*Mermaids: The New Evidence 2014*".

In August 2014, a special event called "*No, mermaids don't exist! Panel on impact of fake documentaries on public understanding*" was held at the International Marine Conservation Congress (Glasgow, Scotland). The event highlighted the extent and severity of the problem, with over 32 million people watching these shows alone.

The Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) believes these fakumentary series and sensationalism-based shows have a negative impact on public understanding of marine science, affecting real life education and conservation efforts. Thus, SCB decided to join the efforts of others and write a letter to Discovery Communication to express our concerns.

A copy of the letter we sent can be found [here](#).

A general piece on how television is failing science by Deep Sea News, "*RIP: Science on TV*" can be found [here](#).

The response of South Africa's National Sea Rescue Institute to *Shark of Darkness: Wrath of Submarine* can be found [here](#).

