Shark finning

**Shark finning** refers to the removal and retention of shark fins and the discarding at sea of the carcass. Shark finning takes place at sea so the fishers only have to transport the fins.

Shark finning is widespread, and largely unmanaged and unmonitored. Shark finning has increased over the past decade largely due to the increasing demand for shark fins for Chinese shark fin soup and traditional cures, improved fishing technology, and improved market economics. Shark specialists estimate that anywhere between 38 million-100 million sharks are killed for their fins, annually.[1] Shark fins are a billion dollar industry.[2]

**Process**

According to wildlife conservation much of the sharks’ fin trade uses fins cut from living sharks, called finning.[3] Because shark meat is worth much less, the now finless and often still-living sharks are thrown back into the sea to make room for more of the valuable fins.[3] In the ocean, the sharks either die from suffocation or are eaten because they are unable to move normally.

**Impact and reporting**

According to Giam Choo Hoo, the longest serving member of The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora Animals Committee, “The perception that it is common practice to kill sharks for only their fins - and to cut them off whilst the sharks are still alive - is wrong... The vast majority of fins in the market are taken from sharks after their death.”[4] However, some researchers dispute this claim after extensive examination of fin sourcing and fisheries data; one study of sharks harvested for their valuable fins estimates that between 26-73 million sharks are killed each year worldwide,[5] which is almost three times higher than official Food and Agriculture Organization estimates.[6]

The crew of the conservation vessel Ocean Warrior witnessed and photographed industrial-scale finning within Costa Rica’s Cocos Island National Park protected marine area.[7] The practice is featured in the documentary *Sharks: Stewards of the Reef*, which contains footage from Western Australia and Central America and also examines shark finning's cultural, financial and ecological impacts. Underwater photographer Richard Merritt also has witnessed finning of living sharks in Indonesia where he saw immobile finless sharks lying on the sea bed still alive below the fishing boat.[8] Finning has been witnessed and filmed within a protected marine area in the Raja
Ampat islands of Indonesia.[9]

![Dorsal fin of a shark](image1)

Animal welfare groups vigorously oppose finning on moral grounds and also because it is one cause for the rapid decline of global shark populations.[3] On the IUCN red list there are 39 species of elasmobranches (sharks and rays) listed as threatened species (Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable).[10] CITES lists three sharks in Appendix II: the basking shark, the great white shark, and the whale shark. Appendix II lists those species that are not in danger of extinction, but which require controls on international trade to maintain their populations. It is estimated that 10–100 million sharks are slaughtered each year for their fins with a median figure of 38 million.[11] The industry is valued at US$1.2 billion; because of the lucrative profits, there are allegations of links to organized crime.[2] [11]

They also raise questions on the medical harm from the consumption of high levels of toxic mercury reportedly found in shark fins.

Numbers of some shark species have dropped as much as 80% over the last 50 years.[12] Some organizations claim that shark fishing or bycatch (the unintentional capture of species by other fisheries) is the reason for the decline in some species' populations and that the market for fins has very little impact — bycatch accounts for an estimated 50% of all sharks taken[3] — others that the market for shark fin soup is the main reason for the decline.[12] Tommy Cheung, the legislator representing Hong Kong's catering sector, said: "I don't believe sharks are an endangered species. Some species of shark may be, but not all shark's fin comes from certain species. There are a lot of species that are plentiful."[13] There is no reliable count for the numbers taken in the shark fin trade and thus it is hard to prove the claims on either side of the argument.[3]

According to Giam's article, "sharks are caught virtually all parts of the world. Despite the strongly declared objectives of the Fisheries Commission in Brussels, there are very few restrictions on fishing for sharks in European waters. The meat of dogfishes, smoothhounds, cat sharks, skates and rays is in high demand by European consumers...The situation in Canada and the United States is similar: the blue shark is sought after as a sport fish while the porbeagle, mako and spiny dogfish are part of the commercial fishery...the truth is this: Sharks will continue to be caught and killed on a wide scale by the more organized and sophisticated fishing nations...targeting shark's fin soup will not stop this accidental catch. The fins from these catches will be thrown away or turned into animal feed and fertilizers if shark's fin soup is shunned."

**International reaction**

Many countries now prohibit finning; however, many international waters are unregulated. International fishing authorities are considering banning shark fishing (and finning) in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. Finning is banned in the Eastern Pacific,[14] but shark fishing and finning continues unabated in most of the Pacific and Indian Ocean.[3] In countries such as Thailand and Singapore, public awareness advertisements on finning have reportedly reduced consumption by 25%. In 2007, Canadian filmmaker and biologist Rob Stewart created a film,
Shark finning, which exposes the shark fin industry in detail.

**China**

NBA All-Star Yao Ming pledged to stop eating shark fin soup at a news conference on August 2, 2006. Yao's comments were largely unreported in the Chinese media and drew a reproach from Chinese seafood industry associations. Ironically, shark fin soup was on Yao Ming's wedding dinner menu.[15] [16] U.S. basketball player Tracy McGrady, a team mate of Yao's, reportedly said that he was impressed by the soup when he tried it for the first time, but was criticized by the Hong Kong branch of the World Wildlife Federation for his remark.[17] Late Australian naturalist Steve Irwin was known to walk out of Chinese restaurants if he saw shark fin soup on the menu.[18] The Chinese-American chef, Ken Hom, sees the West doing little to protect stocks of cod and caviar-producing sturgeon despite the outcry over shark-finning, but he also stresses the wastefulness of harvesting only the fins.[19]

**Hong Kong**

Hong Kong Disneyland dropped shark fin soup from its wedding banquet menu after international pressure from environmental groups, who threatened to boycott its parks worldwide despite the high demand for the delicacy in China.[20] The University of Hong Kong has banned shark fin on campus.[21]

**Malaysia**

On September 15, 2007, Malaysia's Natural Resources and Environment Ministry Azmi Khalid banned shark's fin soup from official functions committing to the Malaysian Nature Society (for conservation of shark species).[22]

**New Zealand**

The great white sharks have been given full protection in the territorial waters of New Zealand[23] but shark finning is legal on other shark species if the shark is dead. The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand are campaigning to raise awareness of shark finning[24] and a number of foodies have fronted the campaign.[25]

**Palau**

In 2009, the Republic of Palau created the world's first shark sanctuary. It is illegal to catch sharks within Palau's EEZ, which covers an area of 230,000 square miles. This is an area about the size of France. President Johnson Toribiong also called for a ban on global shark finning, stating: "These creatures are being slaughtered and are perhaps at the brink of extinction unless we take positive action to protect them."

**United States**

Bill Clinton banned finning in the United States and with U.S.-registered vessels, but not foreign-registered vessels. Shark fins cannot be imported into the U.S. without the associated carcass. In 1991, the percentage of sharks killed by U.S. longline fisheries in the Pacific Ocean for finning was approximately 3%. By 1998, that percentage had grown to 60%. Between 1991 and 1998, the number of sharks retained by the Hawaii-based swordfish and tuna longline fishery had increased from 2,289 to 60,857 annually, and by 1998, an estimated 98% of these sharks were
Shark finning

killed for their fins.

In January 2009, the United States House of Representatives passed the Shark Conservation Act of 2009 to close loopholes in the US finning ban. The measure is pending in the United States Senate.

In 2010, Hawaii became the first state to ban the possession, sale and distribution of shark fins. The law will take effect on July 1, 2011.\[27\]

## See also

- Overfishing
- Shark fin soup

## External links

- Triple Threat: World Fin Trade May Harvest up to 73 Million Sharks per Year\[29\], research published in *Ecology Letters*, September 2006
- Shark Finning Fact sheet\[30\]
- In Search of Credibility & Cooperation in Shark Conservation\[31\]
- Decimating Shark Population for Some Soup\[32\]
- Shark Fin Soup\[33\] ...a painting with a point
- Shark Finning Resource Center\[34\]

## References

Shark finning


[34] http://www.sensoryescapeimages.com/what-is-shark-finning/
**Article Sources and Contributors**


**Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors**


**License**

Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/