

fin-to-carcass ratio. The fin-to-carcass ratio methodology is clearly not working and must be replaced with a requirement that any sharks allowed to be killed are brought to shore with their fins attached.

SPECIES OF CONCERN

While many shark populations have faced steep declines due to years of exploitation and international trade, only three species—the basking, great white and whale sharks—are covered by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Many more desperately need protection.

Species used for their fins and other parts include blue, spiny dogfish, shortfin mako, porbeagle, hammerhead, whale, sandbar, basking, ocean whitetip, silky, bull, thresher, spurdog and angel sharks. The smalltooth sawfish, a ray related to sharks, is also killed for use in shark fin soup. All species of sawfish, except one found in Australian waters, were added to CITES Appendix I in 2007, affording them the most stringent protection from international trade. The Australian sawfish was listed on Appendix II. Over 100 shark species appear on the World Conservation Union Red List of Threatened Species.

A negative public image is one of the factors impeding shark conservation. Sharks have been cursed with the inaccurate reputation of being man-eating monsters. However, more people die each year from lightning strikes than shark attacks. Out of nearly 400 species, only three have been identified as being responsible for attacks on humans. Clearly, humans are a major threat to sharks, rather than the reverse.



corbis.com

Docile whale sharks, the biggest living fish, are still targeted for their meat and large fins—despite their declining population numbers.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Help sharks by not purchasing any shark products. If you encounter a business that sells shark fins or other shark products, please voice your distaste to the management, discontinue your patronage, and email details to us at nosharkfinning@awionline.org.

Also contact these policymakers to ask for effective shark conservation initiatives, including more non-lethal shark research; a requirement that if sharks are fished, they be brought to shore with their fins attached to their bodies; a prohibition on take of overfished shark species; and a reduction in shark bycatch:

- Please write the Secretary General of the United Nations to request a global ban on shark finning (Secretary General, UN Headquarters, First Avenue at 46th Street, New York, NY 10017).
- If you live in the United States, contact your Members of Congress and write to the National Marine Fisheries Service (1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910).
- If you live in Europe, contact the European Commission (Directorate-General for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Rue Joseph II, 99, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium; Fax: +32 2 299 30 40).
- If you live outside of these areas, contact your local fisheries policy officials, encouraging support for an effective ban on shark finning.

ABOUT US

The Animal Welfare Institute is a non-profit charitable organization that was founded in 1951 to reduce the sum total of pain and fear inflicted on animals by humans.




Fiona Ayerst/Marine PhotoBank

Gillnets are responsible for the deaths of millions of animals. Bull sharks are one of many shark species that die as bycatch from this unregulated fishing method.



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cover: Chris Newbert/Minden Pictures

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SHARK FIN SOUP

A shark's pectoral and dorsal fins are one of the most valuable fish products in the world, as the main ingredients in the Asian "delicacy" shark fin soup. Commonly served at weddings and banquets, this dish is seen as a sign of wealth and carries a price tag as high as \$100 US a bowl. Much of its consumption occurs in Asia, but it is found throughout the world—including in the United States.

The demand for shark fin soup is leading to the depletion of many shark species and upsetting the sensitive balance of the oceans. Though some believe consuming shark fins may help fight cancer, the Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research tested shark fins purchased in Bangkok in 2001 and found that 70 percent of the samples contained extremely high levels of mercury, which can be toxic to humans.

A SHARK'S ROLE

As top predators, sharks serve as caretakers of their ocean environments. By feeding on the sick and weak, they strengthen prey populations and maintain the genetic quality of species below them in the food chain. Some sharks are also scavengers, removing the dead from their environments. The presence of sharks likely encourages biodiversity in an ecosystem. In 2007, the depletion of sharks in the

Atlantic Ocean contributed to an explosion of their prey. The excessive numbers of rays and skates, two species that feed on scallops, led to a collapse in the scallop population. Although there is still more to be learned about the role of sharks in ecosystems, it is clear that their disappearance will wreak havoc on the populations of other marine species.

Sharks themselves are particularly vulnerable because they mature late in life, grow slowly, and produce very few young. Their biology more closely resembles whales and dolphins than that of fellow fish. In some species, individuals do not reach sexual maturity until the age of 20, and they can have a gestation period lasting up to two years. Unlike bony fish, sharks produce a handful of pups instead of a large number of eggs. Shark populations are extremely slow to recover from overfishing, and many experts have suggested that shark fishing cannot be sustainable.

INDUSTRY'S IMPACT

Over 100 species of shark are targeted each year for their meat, liver, oil, teeth, cartilage and fins. Approximately 50 million sharks die annually as bycatch (via fishermen targeting other species) in unregulated and indiscriminant longline, gillnet and trawl fisheries. High seas swordfish fisheries in Taiwan, Japan and Spain routinely catch large numbers of sharks as bycatch and then opportunistically take their fins.

An estimated 73 million sharks are killed yearly for the shark fin trade. Because of the high value of shark fins and the relatively low value of their meat, sharks are often "fanned" while alive, which is by far the most cruel, unsustainable and wasteful method of killing a

shark. Typically, sharks are brought aboard a ship, have their fins sliced off, and are thrown back into the sea, where they suffocate, bleed to death, or are eaten by other animals. Appallingly, the animals are usually conscious throughout the entire ordeal, and thus endure unthinkable suffering.

The top shark fishing nations are India, Indonesia and Spain, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. However, the United States, Taiwan, Mexico, Argentina, Thailand, Japan, France, Brazil, the United Kingdom and New Zealand also engage in shark fishing. The European Union (EU) is the largest supplier of shark fins to China. Despite the worldwide depletion of shark species, many of these countries do not have any means of managing shark fisheries—and those who do tend to have weak, incomplete, or poorly enforced laws.

Many of the countries with shark finning bans do not require that whole carcasses with fins be brought to shore. Instead, a fin-to-carcass ratio, whereby the weight of the fins must not be more than a certain percentage of that of the carcasses, is enforced. Once fins are removed, however, it is nearly impossible to determine what species they were taken from, making enforcement very difficult and allowing fisherman to flout the law and mix and match the bodies and fins of various sharks.

The EU instituted a shark finning ban in 2003, but with a considerably higher fin-to-carcass ratio than other countries—making it virtually useless. Subsequently, four respected intergovernmental fisheries organizations all issued non-binding recommendations against shark finning, including a high



Chris Fallows/apexpredators.com

Hammerhead sharks are regular victims of finning. Great and scalloped hammerheads in particular are rapidly declining as a result of overfishing and a lack of adequate laws.



Fiona Ayles/Marine PhotoBank

Once a delicacy for the elite, the demand for shark fin soup is growing with China's booming economy, causing the collapse of many shark populations.



Andy Murch/istmodriver.com

The spiny dogfish shark is commonly consumed in England as "fish and chips" and "rock salmon." In some areas, the species has experienced a 90 to 99 percent decline.