



STOP SHARK FINNING

What is shark finning?

Finning is the process of cutting off the fins of a shark and discarding the body at sea. This wasteful and often cruel practice contradicts all principles of sustainable shark fisheries management and conservation.

Why does shark finning occur?

While fins are very valuable, shark meat has limited commercial value, providing a strong incentive for shark finning. The major source of demand for shark fins is the market for shark fin soup. In some Far Eastern cultures this is a prestigious commodity, and a traditional means of honouring special guests or occasions.

Once processed, fibres from fins are used to give the soup a glutinous consistency. The fins are tasteless, so pork or chicken is used for flavour.

In the last decade, increased average wealth in the Far East and efficient modern fishing methods have resulted in a massive increase in demand for and supply of fins.



Shark fins: one of the most valuable fish products in the world

Who is involved in shark finning, and where?

Finning occurs worldwide and is most common in high seas fisheries, hundreds of miles out to sea. Oceanic fishing fleets target valuable fish such as tuna, using thousands of baited hooks on miles of long-line, and freezing their catch onboard. Unfortunately, long-liners often catch several times as many sharks than they do tuna. Until relatively recently, this shark 'bycatch' was considered a nuisance, and sharks were cut loose and allowed to swim away. However, as shark fins have become increasingly valuable, fewer sharks are being released. Bycatch is often not officially landed at ports, therefore data on the extent of the trade are limited. Traditionally Hong Kong was the centre for shark fin imports however the economic rise of China has seen an increase in imports through mainland routes making accurate tracking of trade in shark fins more difficult.

In small inshore fisheries in tropical countries, sun-drying of fins requires minimal technology and artisanal fishermen are encouraged by shark fin-traders to target local populations of sharks. As a result, even coastal shark populations in the remotest parts of the world are now vulnerable to over-exploitation, and rapid depletion of local shark populations often results from such trading activity.

Why are sharks vulnerable to exploitation?

The life history of sharks is typical of top predators, and completely different to most commercial fish, which mature early and produce vast numbers of tiny eggs. In comparison, most sharks grow slowly, mature late and give birth to a few large pups after a long gestation period. Consequently, shark populations decline rapidly when targeted by fisheries and recover slowly, if at all. Shark populations may continue to decline, potentially to unviable levels with species becoming regionally extinct. There are now 126 species of chondrichthyan fish listed in a threat category on the IUCN's Red List, with a further 107 species listed as Near Threatened.

WHY OPPOSE SHARK FINNING?

- Although some sharks are killed before finning (a live shark represents a danger on board), many are still alive when their fins are cut off, and are thrown back into the sea alive to die.
- Finning is hugely wasteful - wet fins typically represent less than 5% of a shark's body weight & discarded carcasses could provide a valuable protein source, particularly in developing countries.
- The environmental impact of removing large numbers of sharks from ocean ecosystems is hugely complex and unpredictable. Most sharks are top predators and scientists believe sharks play a key role in marine ecosystems by keeping their prey populations in check. Removing this control is likely to have a damaging effect on marine ecosystems.
- Today many shark populations are experiencing a downward spiral of reduced populations due to increasing fishing pressure and increasing prices. Over the last 15 years some Atlantic shark populations have declined by up to 90%. However due to the covert nature of the fin trade fins originating from illegal, unreported or unregulated (IUU) fisheries means that we have likely underestimated the effect on global shark populations.

2009: WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- ✓ Sign the Trust's "End UK Special Fishing Permits" petition and collect as many signatures as you can: www.sharktrust.org/petition.
- ✓ Encourage your politician to sign up to the Early Day Motion (find out how here: www.sharktrust.org/edm).
- ✓ Write a letter to your relevant government department asking for implementation of the FAO-IPOA and support for a worldwide ban on shark finning.
- ✓ Avoid eating shark fin soup, and bring the facts about shark finning to retailers' attention.
- ✓ Look at our website for more campaigning ideas and information: www.sharktrust.org/campaigns.

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Is shark finning legal?

Although Europe includes some of the world's most important shark fishing nations, the EU legislation on shark finning is among the weakest in the world.

In 2003 the EU adopted a shark finning regulation (EC) No:1185/2003 prohibiting the removal of shark fins at sea. However, fishermen prefer to store shark fins and meat separately, so most finning bans are enforced through a fin to carcass weight ratio limit. The UK is one of four EU Member States that, through the provision of Special Fishing Permits (SFP), still permit the removal of shark fins at sea. The fin:carcass ratio adopted by the EU potentially allows fishers to land twice as many fins as carcasses and so most experts agree that the most effective way to close this loophole (and halt shark finning globally) is for sharks with fins naturally attached. In recent years UK vessels have been landing over 80 tonnes of shark fin per year and so the Shark Trust is lobbying the UK government to cease their provision of these SFPs.

It is currently not illegal to sell shark fin soup or other shark products, unless the product is made from a protected species. Even then the onus is on the enforcement officer to determine which species a product has been made from and prove that the animal was caught and killed after the trade ban commenced – not an easy task!



Finless sharks © Mark Harding

“Out of sight out of mind; I've seen the finless corpses washed up on beaches and the dead and dying on the ocean bottom; shark finning is not only a disgraceful practice in its self, it is also totally unsustainable and the final product is nothing more than tasteless water. A demand fuelled by a mythological potency and the insecurity of the human mind.” **Nick Baker, Shark Trust Patron**

What has the Shark Trust done to stop shark finning?

The Shark Trust is continually involved in raising awareness of shark finning, seeking improvements in UK domestic policy and EU legislation, lobbying against finning at an international level, and supporting other nations in adopting and implementing positive shark management measures. Here's what we've achieved so far:

2001 The Shark Trust, together with WildAid, pioneered the campaign for a total ban on shark finning, bringing the issue of shark finning in European waters and by European vessels to the attention of the European Commission...

2002 We continued to advocate for the adoption of EU shark finning legislation in which was finally adopted in...

2003 The Shark Trust and WildAid presented a petition of 83,000 signatures to Fisheries Minister Ben Bradshaw, campaigning for improvement to existing legislation.

2004 The Trust continued its public awareness campaign on shark finning, and lobbied for greater accountability of EU states involved in shark fisheries.

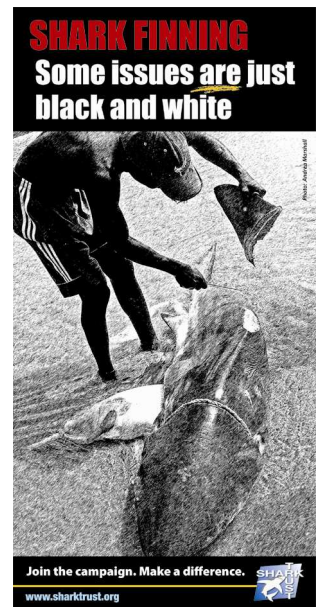
2005 With an upcoming review of EU finning legislation, the Trust stepped up its campaign for improvements to the existing legislation.

2006 The Trust was a founder member of the Shark Alliance (www.sharkalliance.org), a not-for profit coalition of non-governmental organizations dedicated to restoring and conserving shark populations by improving European fishing policy.

2007 Under the Shark Alliance banner the Shark Trust united with shark conservation organisations across Europe to instigate the inaugural European Shark Week and putting pressure on the EU Commission to create the Community Plan of Action for Sharks (CPOA Sharks) they had committed to adopt in 2001.

2008 The long awaited (CPOA Sharks) is finally released for consultation. The Shark Trust supports most of the CPOA's objectives and continues to urge the EU Commission to adopt a strong CPOA.

2009 The CPOA is formally adopted by the EU with shark finning review a priority action. The Shark Trust gains cross party support to for an Early Day Motion to cease the provision of Special Fishing Permits to UK registered fishing vessels.



“I fully support the Shark Trust and other organisations campaigning for tighter EU legislation to stop the finning of sharks. An effective law would be a huge step forward in the battle to stop sharks being pushed towards extinction. Unless finning is stopped all together there will come a time when divers will no longer see these beautiful creatures in the water, which I would regard as an absolute tragedy” **Miranda Krestofnikov, TV Presenter**

Finning Facts

- Hong Kong is the world's shark fin trading centre, accounting for 50-80% of fins traded worldwide. Currently the EU supplies 27% of all fins imported into Hong Kong.
- Sharks' life history makes them vulnerable to exploitation – for example, Basking Sharks take 15-20 years to mature, have a 2-3 year gestation period and produce only 4–6 pups.
- Wet fins typically represent < 5% of a shark's body weight.
- Some Atlantic shark populations have declined by up to 90% in the last 15 years.
- Sets of fins can sell for more than US\$700/kg, with Hammerhead Shark fins among the most valuable by weight.
- A single Whale Shark pectoral fin can sell for up to US\$15,000.
- Global trade in shark fins is increasing, and the market for shark fin soup is estimated to be growing by 5% per year.
- The EU's fin to carcass ratio is among the weakest in the world.
- A third of European sharks, and a total of 126 species of chondrichthyan fish are listed under a threat category on the IUCN Red List, with a further 107 species Near Threatened. www.redlist.org.
- Find out more at www.sharktrust.org/finning.