

Ancient species under threat

Sharks inhabited the world's ocean at least one hundred million years before the arrival of the first dinosaurs. It is estimated that the earliest shark species began to evolve around 408 million years ago.

Slow to reproduce

While bony fish, such as cod, can produce millions of eggs at a time, shark reproduction is more like that of whales and dolphins. Most shark species do not mature for many years, can have a gestation period of up to 22 months and produce only a handful to a few hundred pups at a time. This means that any protective measures put in place today will not yield results for years.

An unfair reputation

Despite the shark's reputation as a vicious predator, very few – perhaps ten – of the more than 400 species of shark have been known to attack humans and often this is because humans are mistaken for the sharks' normal prey. On average, sharks kill around 12 people a year – far fewer than are killed by lightning, by slipping in the bath, by dog bites or bee stings.

BELOW: Sun-drying shark fins; TAIWAN.



ABOVE: Shark fins on sale; TAIWAN.

FRONT TOP: Raggy shark – a survivor of finning; Sodwana, SOUTH AFRICA

BOTTOM: Shark fins drying on Cape Town docks; SOUTH AFRICA.

About our campaign

WildAid is carrying out investigations on sharks all over the world. In October 2000 we will publish a major new report on the trade in shark fins and other threats to sharks and our film will be broadcast worldwide. We are using the shocking findings of our research to push for greater global protection for sharks.

Our campaign goals are to ensure that sharks, skates and rays are conserved and that any use of sharks is sustainable and not unnecessarily cruel and wasteful, by:

- *raising global public and policy-maker awareness of the threats to sharks.
- *ending the practice of finning (discarding the shark's body).
- *reducing the excess demand for shark fin and other shark products by educating consumers.
- *encouraging governments, fishery managers, buyers and fishermen to safeguard the long-term viability of shark populations.
- *encouraging the monitoring of shark catches, the use of bycatch-reduction methods and the implementation of measures designed to achieve sustainability.

To find out how you can help visit:

www.wildaid.org



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The global shark crisis

WildAid

“I want to use every medium at my disposal to show that the villains today are the people and not these fish”

—Peter Benchley, author of *Jaws*,
SUNDAY TIMES, 8 AUGUST 1999

Sharks in crisis

100 million sharks and shark-like fish are caught each year, according to UN Food and Agriculture organisation estimates. Some species have declined by as much as 80% in the past decade and some may become ecologically extinct within the next decade.

Sharks are indicators of the oceans' ecological health. As “apex predators”, serious disturbances to their numbers affect many other species below them in the food chain. There is evidence that some fish stocks have collapsed because of the reduction in shark numbers.



The “boom and bust” pattern of shark exploitation has been repeated many times all over the world, with the same result: localised economic extinction.

The morning catch; INDIA.

The global trade in shark fins

In the last fifteen years, with greater affluence, demand for shark fin soup has boomed in Asia. Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan are the main shark fin trading centres. Asian consumers are unaware of the cruelty and unsustainability of the shark fin trade.

Increasingly on the high seas sharks are “finned” and the rest of their bodies, often still alive, are dumped at sea. Shark meat is often too low-value compared to the target species (e.g. tuna) so 95-99% of the shark is discarded to conserve hold space.

Shark fin provides gelatinous bulk in shark fin soup, but it has no taste – the soup has to be flavoured with chicken or other stock. While a fisherman in India will earn only \$6 per pound of shark fin, a bowl of soup can cost \$100 in a Hong Kong restaurant.

Finning a shark for export to Singapore; INDIA.



International apathy

Thirteen of 17 of the world's major marine fishing zones are at their limits, in decline, or in recovery from overfishing. As sharks have historically been regarded as low-value bycatch, no effort has been put into managing shark fisheries. There are very few accurate data on overall shark catches, let alone by species, and only four countries (USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada) have any shark management plan at all.

There are no mandatory international management plans for sharks; all attempts to protect sharks internationally have been thwarted by the fishing industry and, in particular, by the Japanese government.

Many subsistence fishermen and communities in countries such as India, Kenya and Brazil, depend on shark meat as a low cost source of protein. Commercial fishing, often by foreign fleets finning sharks, is contributing to collapses in the catch in some of the poorest areas of the world.



Hammerhead shark fetuses removed from carcass of mother; INDIA.

Some species in trouble

The female spiny dogfish has the longest gestation period of any animal. She does not mature until her early twenties, is pregnant for 22 months and produces only 6-8 pups. The UK imports large quantities of spiny dogfish for sale as “Rock



Salmon” in Fish and Chip shops. UK fishermen report a 50% decline in catches over the past four years: 90% of imports now come from the USA where catches have quadrupled since 1990, causing an alarming decline in the species. But so far fishing interests have blocked conservation efforts.

Basking sharks have declined by 50-80% around UK waters in the past twenty years, and similar declines have been noted in Norway. This species is caught and discarded as “bycatch” and is also targeted for the fin trade. Previous basking shark fisheries in Ireland, Scotland, British

Columbia and California have all collapsed.

Whale sharks, the huge, plankton-feeding “gentle giants” of the sea are in serious decline. A proposal to restrict trade in their products recently failed and the slaughter continues. Their

massive fins fetch exorbitant prices in Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore. Whale sharks are a highly popular tourist attraction and whale shark-watching projects are under way in the Philippines, the Maldives and the Seychelles.