



Stop Shark Finning!



“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 is shark finning?

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

Why does it occur?

Fins are easy to store, require no refrigeration and are worth significantly more than the meat, creating an economic incentive to retain the fins alone. In some Far Eastern cultures shark fin soup is a prestigious and traditional dish used to honour special occasions. Fibres from fins give the soup a glutinous consistency, although are tasteless so pork or chicken is used for flavour.

Where does it happen?

Finning occurs worldwide and is most common in high seas fisheries. Oceanic fishing fleets targeting valuable fish such as tuna, use thousands of baited hooks on miles of long-line, which often catch more sharks than their intended catch. Bycatch is often not officially landed at ports; therefore data on the extent of the trade is limited.

Hong Kong has traditionally been the centre for shark fin imports, however China's economic rise twinned with increased imports through mainland routes, makes the accurate tracking of the shark fin trade even more difficult. Even coastal shark populations in the remotest parts of the world are now vulnerable to over-exploitation from small inshore fisheries.

Is it legal?

Unless from a protected species, trading in shark fins is legal. Even then, determining which species a product has been made from and proving that the animal was caught after the trade ban/protection commenced is not an easy task! The act of shark finning is prohibited in many countries and by approximately half of the Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (the bodies managing the high seas).

A number of finning bans permit the removal of shark fins at sea, allowing fins and carcasses to be stored separately. This process is enforced through a fin to carcass weight ratio. Depending on different legislations, this ratio could be set at 5% of the whole/live weight (LW) of the shark, or 5% of the dressed weight (head and organs removed). Research suggests that the fins of an 'average shark' comprise ~2% of its LW, so a 5% ratio allows more fins to be landed than carcasses which can allow finning to go undetected and unpunished.

Enforcement is difficult as many finning bans allow fins and carcasses to be landed in separate ports so identifying the finless, headless trunk of a shark is challenging. Therefore, it's no surprise that there are three to four times more fins on the market than can be accounted for.

The solution

EU legislation (5% LW) is lenient, potentially allowing fishermen to land more fins than carcasses. The best way to halt shark finning is to close this loophole and require that all sharks are landed with their fins naturally attached, no exceptions. The UK ceased issuing Special Fishing Permits (allowing the removal of fins at sea) in 2009, meaning that all UK vessels anywhere in the world must land sharks with their fins naturally attached – the only member states still to issue these permits and allow the removal of shark fins at sea are Spain and Portugal.

Prohibiting the removal of shark fins at sea is the way forwards - no need for complicated rules or ratios, enforcement would be simplified as any fins found on a vessel without a carcass would be illegal, and the ability to identify the species landed would aid data collection and species specific management.



What has the Shark Trust done to stop shark finning?

The Shark Trust has been at the forefront of the fight to ban shark finning for the past 15 years. The Shark Trust is continually involved in raising awareness, 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. MEPs asking them to sign the Declaration. The majority of MEPs added their names and the Written Declaration was adopted as a resolution, the Commission later released their proposals for consultation.

- 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 EU vessels to the attention of the EU Commission.
- 2002** We continued to advocate for the adoption of EU shark finning legislation, which was finally adopted in 2003.
- 2003** The Shark Trust and WildAid presented a petition of 83,000 signatures to Fisheries Minister Ben Bradshaw, campaigning for improvement to existing legislation. The EU adopted shark finning regulation (EC) No:1185/2003 prohibiting the removal of shark fins at sea.
- 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** Became a Founder member of the Shark Alliance (www.sharkalliance.org), a not-for profit coalition of non-government organisations 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 put pressure on the EU Commission to create the Community Plan of Action for Sharks (CPOA Sharks) that they had committed to adopt in 2001.
- 2008** The long awaited CPOA Sharks was finally released for consultation. The Shark Trust supported most of the CPOA's objectives and continues to urge the EU Commission to adopt a strong CPOA.
- 2009** The CPOA was formally adopted by the EU with the shark finning review as a priority action. UK Fisheries Ministers announced their decision to end the provision of Special Fishing Permits, ensuring the UK fleet complies with the original intent of the finning ban – that sharks are landed with their fins naturally attached.
- 2010** In September, four Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) launched a 'Written Declaration' calling on the Commission to deliver a proposal to completely prohibit the removal of shark fins on-board vessels. The Trust along with the Shark Alliance urged the public to write to their MEPs asking them to sign the Declaration. The majority of MEPs added their names and the Written Declaration was adopted as a resolution, the Commission later released their proposals for consultation.
- 2011** The Shark Trust secured a comprehensive UK response to the consultation, making a strong case for Fins Naturally Attached (FNA). Over the year, the Trust met with the UK Fisheries Minister, Permanent Fisheries Representatives and MEPs to discuss support of the FNA policy. During European Shark Week, 165,000 European citizens (60,000 generated from the UK alone) signed a petition encouraging MEPs to support strengthening of the EU finning ban. In November, the Commission proposed an end to the removal of shark fins on-board all EU vessels worldwide.
- 2012** The EU Council of Fisheries Ministers adopted a position in favour of FNA with positive support also demonstrated by the European Parliament Environment Committee. The EU Parliament Fisheries Committee met in September to vote, the results of which were contradictory, and a final vote in plenary is currently scheduled for November. The Shark Trust has been briefing MEPs throughout this lengthy process and has continued to urge MEPs to endorse a strict EU policy against removing shark fins at sea, without exceptions.

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.
- 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.
- Visit www.eusharkjourney.org to learn more and add your voice to the campaign!