



SHARKS

FROM RULERS OF THE SEAS TO ENDANGERED SPECIES



Sharks have roamed the seas for hundreds of millions of years. Perfect predators at the top of the food chain, sharks had few enemies until humans began to exploit them.

In the past few decades, the surge in demand for shark products—especially shark fins—has blurred the line between wanted and unwanted catch (bycatch).

The fins of between 26 million and 73 million sharks pass through the Hong Kong fin market alone each year, and this market accounts for only half of the global fin trade.

Sharks previously discarded, often alive, are now retained for commercial purposes, thereby increasing pressure on shark populations.

Twenty-six species of shark are now endangered, and an additional 115 species are vulnerable or near threatened. Continuing shark declines indicate a lack of adequate management, regulations and enforcement of shark conservation measures.

CONSERVATION MEASURES

As shark species continue to decline around the world, awareness of the urgent need for shark conservation has grown. Many countries have banned shark finning in an effort to curb shark declines and related ocean ecosystem damage.

A worldwide demand for shark parts and unregulated international trade are causing shark populations to plummet.



DECLINING POPULATIONS

Today sharks face many threats. The most pressing include:

- over-fishing
- illegal fishing
- bycatch

CONSERVATION MEASURES NOT ENOUGH

Members of OSPESCA, the Central American region fisheries management organization, agreed in 2012 to implement legislation mandating that sharks must be landed with their fins naturally attached to their bodies. Taiwan adopted similar legislation this year that will be fully implemented by January 1, 2013. Many other countries already have similar laws.



Some countries have created marine reserves for sharks or implemented bans on all shark catches.

CONSERVATION MEASURES BY COUNTRY

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| BAHAMAS | All commercial shark fishing is banned | 2011 |
| EGYPT | Fishing for sharks is banned in territorial waters in the Red Sea | 2005 |
| HONDURAS | All shark fishing is banned | 2010 |
| ISRAEL | All shark fishing is banned | 1980 |
| MARSHALL ISLANDS | All commercial shark fishing is banned | 2010 |
| MEXICO | Shark fishing is banned from May-August each year | 2011 |
| PALAU | All shark fishing is banned | 2009 |
| REPUBLIC OF THE MALDIVES | All shark fishing is banned | 2010 |

SHARK FINNING BAN BY COUNTRY

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| AMERICAN SAMOA (2012) | MEXICO (2007) |
| ARGENTINA (2009) | NAMIBIA (2000) |
| AUSTRALIA | NEW ZEALAND (2004) |
| BRAZIL (1998) | NICARAGUA (2004) |
| CANADA (1994) | OMAN (<1999) |
| CAPE VERDE (2005) | PANAMA (2006) |
| CENTRAL AMERICA (2012) | SEYCHELLES (2006) |
| CHILE (2011) | SIERRA LEONE (<1998) |
| COLOMBIA (2007) | SPAIN (2002) |
| COSTA RICA (2001) | TAIWAN (2012) |
| ECUADOR (2004) | UNITED KINGDOM (2009) |
| EL SALVADOR (2006) | UNITED STATES (2011) |
| EUROPEAN UNION (2009) | VENEZUELA (2012) |



Sharks like these hammerheads, are especially vulnerable to overfishing because they are long-lived, slow to mature and produce few young.

In addition, shark species retention measures are now being adopted by regional and international fishery treaties:

CONSERVATION MEASURES BY TREATY

| | | |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| WCPFC | The retention of oceanic whitetip sharks is prohibited | 2012 |
| IATTC | The retention of oceanic whitetip sharks is prohibited | 2012 |
| ICCAT | The retention of silky sharks is prohibited with an exemption for domestic consumption in developing coastal states | 2011 |
| ICCAT | The retention of hammerhead sharks is prohibited with an exemption for domestic consumption in developing coastal states | 2010 |
| ICCAT | The retention of oceanic whitetip sharks is prohibited | 2010 |
| ICCAT | The retention of bigeye thresher sharks is prohibited | 2009 |

Marine reserves and shark fishing bans do help, but they are limited to small areas of the vast oceans sharks roam and do nothing to address the serious underlying problem of unregulated international trade.

Moreover, the measures adopted by regional fishery agreements are designed to address sharks as bycatch only. No regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) have been created to manage fisheries that target sharks. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has adopted some guidelines for shark fisheries, but they do not have the mandate to manage fisheries or regulate trade.

Shark catches are reported by total volume, so species-specific data is lacking even though some species are more imperiled than others.

INTERNATIONAL SHARK TRADE MUST BE REGULATED

The over-exploitation of shark populations to meet the worldwide demand for shark products is causing declines in populations of some shark species. Unfortunately, most shark fisheries are reported by volume and are not species specific. Thus, fishery practices are not selective and their effects on each species is not monitored even though they can vary by species and put some species at more risk than others.

The same is true for international trade in sharks. Shark products are rarely labeled by species and cannot be reported at the species level. Therefore fisheries managers do not have the necessary data to sustainably manage each species.

Regulating the international trade is necessary to provide the species-specific data fishery managers need to manage shark fisheries sustainably.



CITES CAN SAVE SHARKS

CITES is the only international treaty that has the mandate, the experience and the capacity to regulate international trade in wildlife, including marine species.

Most of the shark proposals presented at CITES Conference of the Parties (COPs) for Appendix II have received the support of the majority of Parties.

VOTING RECORD FOR APPENDIX II SHARK PROPOSALS RECEIVING MAJORITY “YES” VOTE

| SPECIES | FAVOR | AGAINST | ABSTAIN |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|
| Whale shark (<i>R. typus</i>) (CoP12) | 81 | 37 | 3 |
| Basking shark (<i>C. maximus</i>) (CoP12) | 82 | 36 | 3 |
| White shark (<i>C. carcharias</i>) (CoP13) | 87 | 34 | 9 |
| Porbeagle shark (<i>L. nasus</i>) (CoP15) | 84 | 46 | 10 |
| Scalloped hammerhead shark (<i>S. lewini</i>) (CoP15) | 76 | 53 | 14 |
| Oceanic white tip shark (<i>C. longimanus</i>) (CoP15) | 75 | 51 | 16 |



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Only through CITES regulation of the international shark trade can we end unsustainable exploitation by overfishing and illegal fishing.

To learn more about Defenders' efforts to protect sharks, visit www.defenders.org.