

## Shark Fin Food Culture: Adapting to a New World

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Archaeological reveal with carbon dating back about 400 million years, the oldest vertebrate predators live in our oceans before the time dinosaur and as an apex predators help to play a major role in maintaining a balanced population of marine ecosystem. With vast sizes ranging from 6 inch – 39 feet, there are over 500 species of sharks around the world. This heritage creature need a quick attention before it considered to be extinct in upcoming years.



### Introduction:

Sharks are including in the class of chondrichthyes with some traits like K selection life history make them more threatened with greater mass extinction. More than one fourth part of all shark variety face risk of extinction due to human activities like targeted species overexploitation, bycatch, climate change and habitat loss. Most common species faces the risk of extinction that end up in the shark fin business are *Carcharhinus falciformis*, *Carcharhinus limbatus*, *Lamna nasus*, *Carcharhinus longimanus*, *Carcharhinus brevipinna*, *Galeocerdo cuvier*, *Prionace glauca*, *Carcharhinus leucas*, *Carcharhinus plumbeus*, *Carcharodon carcharias*, *Isurus oxyrinchus*. More than 30 percent of the 1,200 shark species worldwide are currently threatened with extinction and 99 species are classified as endangered or critically endangered. Hong Kong alone handles more than 40 percent of the global shark fin trade.



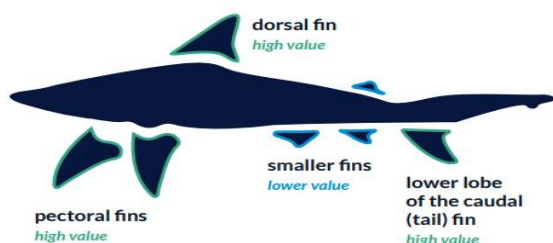
Every year around 73 million of different shark species are caught for dorsal fins trade for shark fin soup alone globally.



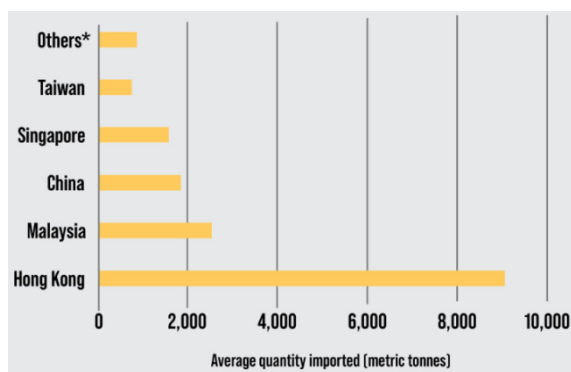
Practice of finning is inhumane and wasteful - cutting off the fins from the live body and discarding at ocean which unable fish to swim effectively due to which they sink at the bottom, die a slow death because of suffocation for 20 minutes.

Among fisherman, Shark fins are tempting targets solely because of cultural value, high monetary, medicinal benefits and traditionally used to make shark fin soup widely. With the time and population expanding of china the demand of fin trade increasing among Asian and European countries and become a staple food globally. So among the fisherman shark collection and selling is more incentive i; e., \$500 a pound (\$1,100 a kilogram). Fin of sharks are actually flavorless and is marinated with other meat such as pork or chicken for hours until it has the desired flavor. Shark fins are the most valuable, expensive traditional seafood products commonly consumed in china, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Macao, Singapore and other countries retailing at US\$400 per kg. Since 1997, the demand of shark finning has increased

sharply for shark fin soup a popular dish on table globally and traditional medicinal products particularly in China as a result of improvement in fishing technology and market economics.



Ranges from US\$540 million - US\$1.2 billion, shark fin are trading globally according to data 2017. While the shark finning is prohibited in United States, some whale shark buyers pay as much as \$10,000 - \$20,000 for a fin. According to wildlife trade monitoring, TRAFFIC report between 2010 and 2016, Malaysia trade on an average 2,556 tons of shark fin per year, with Hong Kong an average of 9,069 tons and third and fourth position handled by China and Singapore with 868 tons and 1,587 tons respectively. 90% of average annual global shark fin imports globally by these 4 largest importers during the same period. The TRAFFIC 2017 report revealed Malaysia ranked third after Hong Kong and China.



Narrow streets of Sai Ying Pun neighborhood, the centre of Hong Kong's dried seafood trade offered shark fins in all shapes and sizes on shelves, stuffed in jars and stacked in bags. Among many shark species two species ie., the smooth hammerhead and the scalloped hammerhead population declined from around 155,500 (1981) - 26,500 (2005) due to excessive shark finning.

In 2013, the CITES (The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) listed 5 more shark species in Appendix II –list includes the species that are currently non-endangered but without regulating their trade these species may become endangered. Shark fin trade still allows in appendix II, the fishing is required to be more sustainable giving the species additional protection. Additionally, many individual countries including China are making their own protections. There has been a sustained lobbying over many years by the likes of Bite-Back Shark & Marine Conservation and Shark Guardian to ban shark-fin imports with run a number of successful campaigns including ‘Hacked Off’ and ‘No Fin to Declare’ as a result the charity was able to declare in 2018 that the number of British restaurants serving shark fin soup had reduced by 82 percent.

#### **India banned shark fin trading but what about the sharks’ lives:**

India is second largest catcher of sharks after Indonesia and around 75000 tons of sharks are caught every year but India is not a big exporter of fins. The government of India in 2014 had banned on export of shark finning but still there was no ban on shark finning and the shark meat is consumed in coastal communities widely. In 2016, The Director-General of Foreign Trade prohibited the export of shark fins through notification which had inserted a new entry in ‘Chapter 3 of Schedule 2 of ITC (HS) Classification of Export and Import Items and it resulted in the ban on exports of shark fins. The main aim of ban was to check the reckless destruction of shark populations for securing most valuable item i; e., the fins in the areas of South-East Asian countries which used the fins making soups as well as medicinal preparations. The government had restricted the catch of only 6 varieties of shark out of 99 species had nothing to do with conservation of marine fishery. Additionally, at the same time, there were no curbs on the sale of shark products i; e., liver oil and other shark-based products. So we need to come up with stricter laws in India to save the marine shark species.

#### **Smuggling of shark fins during Covid 19 proved taste of shark is still strong:**

Seized of 28 tones of illegally smuggled shark fins in Hong Kong in May 2020 has been set a new record in the world of shark fin trade region which was worth more than \$ 1.1 million. In Asian countries the smuggling of shark fin show that the growing appetite taking a toll on ocean ecosystem and communities of fisheries. Many of the people lost their work during pandemic have been forced back in industry globally. At the wildlife conservation society in

New York, the director of shark and rays program Luke Warwick said during the height of Covid 19 probably shark fining is benefited but it is sure that the shark finning trade is increase again in the future.

**Conclusion:**

As sole predators, shark directly impact ecosystems and helps to keep coral reefs healthy by cycling nutrients, cleaning up the reefs by scavenging and removing invasive species. In a 2007 study, scientists found that in the absence of tiger sharks, the populations of *Dugong dugon* moved to the grasses which are more nutritionally superior at the interiors of the beds due to which these areas are putting at greatest risk of overgrazing. Globally Pupils are realizing how sharks are ecologically important and to protect these species beginning to protest against the killing of sharks for their fins. If this horrific industry is allowed to continue we will be wiped out these unique apex predators from our blue oceans permanently. After banning on many countries including china and Japan still shark fin soup on table and smuggle continue. We need to require more detailed species stock assessment references points on shark fin trade. The lower productivity of other marine species common in fin trade, the major difference between the catch and trade estimation data to FAO adds to serious concern about the shark's exploitation.

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