



for a living planet®

# Master of the sea no more

## The threats facing sharks

**T**he expansion of the world's fishing fleets over the past 50 years combined with the rapid growth of consumer spending and poor fishing management has resulted in a global fishing crisis. Sharks have been badly affected. The demand for shark fins, particularly in Hong Kong and mainland China, and for meat in other regions has contributed to a drastic decline in the number of sharks.

While serving the ancient Chinese emperors shark fin soup may have had little impact to the environment, advances in fishing technology and current eating habits are devastating populations of these keystone predators.

### Problems with shark fisheries

#### ***Most shark fisheries are poorly managed:***

There is a dire lack of information worldwide on shark population



numbers and catch rates. Also, most countries have no limits on the amount and type of sharks that can be taken. The development of the International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks) reflects the concern of the international community for the vulnerability and deteriorating status of shark stocks.

However, since the implementation of the plan is

voluntary, adoption has been patchy and limited success has been achieved. The logical solution would be to only consume sharks from sustainably managed fisheries. Indeed, WWF works hard in many parts of the world towards sustainable fisheries, including for sharks. However, before effective sustainable fishery management measures are in place for sharks, we ask the public to stop eating shark fin as a move to preserve

## Real leadership

Individuals and organisations in Hong Kong are increasingly recognising that ignoring the problem is socially irresponsible to this serious threat to marine ecosystems. The following 26 organisations have pledged not to sell or buy shark fin soup as part of their corporate activities, and we thank them for taking leadership in such a critical issue:

- ADM Capital
- ADM Capital Foundation
- Asiatic Marine Ltd
- Atkins China Limited
- Hang Seng Bank Limited
- Hong Kong and China Gas Company Limited
- Hong Kong Cancer Fund
- HSBC
- Johnson Matthey Hong Kong Limited
- Lloyd Northover
- MF Jebsen International Ltd
- Ocean Park Hong Kong
- PPP Company Ltd
- Ronald Lu & Partners (Hong Kong) Ltd
- Shaw & Sons Limited
- Simpson Marine Limited Hong Kong
- Sterling Enterprises Ltd
- Swire Properties Limited
- Swiss Re
- The Hong Kong Institute of Education
- The Samaritans
- The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong)
- The University of Hong Kong
- ThreeSixty
- United Services Recreation Club
- Wind Prospect (HK) Ltd



the endangered species and push for sustainable fisheries management.

### ***Increasingly targeted:***

Although some countries have a long tradition of eating shark meat, in others sharks were only caught accidentally and even released. In recent years as other fish have grown scarce, and the demand for shark fin has rocketed with China's

booming economy, sharks have been increasingly targeted for their fins.

### ***Wastage:***

Compared to other target species like tuna, shark meat is of low value and becomes inedible quickly so 95 to 99 percent of the shark trunk is often thrown overboard, saving space on vessels that are very distant from their home ports.

## Populations of many species are collapsing

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) reported in 2006 that 20 percent of the 547 species of sharks on its Red List are threatened with extinction. The Basking Shark and the Whale Shark were listed in 2002, while the Great White Shark was listed in 2004, on Appendix II of the Convention on International



1. After the catch, the fins and tail are cut from the shark.



2. Sometimes the carcass is kept, sometimes it is thrown back to sea.



3. Cut fins and tails are then dried and packed.

***Our children have a right to appreciate the oceans in their full glory, not as strange and wonderful creatures.***

Trade in Endangered Species of World Fauna and Flora (CITES), meaning permits are needed for international trade in their parts. In June 2007, seven sawfish species were listed on Appendix I of CITES to ban the trade for their fins and other products.

## Why should we protect sharks?

Sharks are widely recognised as being susceptible to overfishing because they grow slowly, are late to mature and produce relatively few young. These characteristics are particularly prominent in deep-water sharks, which are therefore even more vulnerable. Most sharks play an important role as top predators in the marine food chain and significant reductions in their numbers will impair marine ecosystems.

## Hong Kong's role

Hong Kong is one of the biggest markets for shark fins. Hong Kong is the gateway to China and its international trading

status makes it the centre of the shark fin trade. Shark fin soup has become a prestige dish symbolising high social status to many, riding a trend of desiring ever-more luxurious foods. Shark fin itself has little taste, but our appetite for shark fin dishes is a major contributor to huge declines in certain shark populations.

Figures released in 2006 indicate that the catch of sharks worldwide has increased 300 percent since 1950 with about 50 million sharks and rays being directly caught each year (excluding unreported catches). An estimated 10,000 tonnes of shark fins are traded around the world every year, the majority of which end up in China. Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan are all major shark fin trading centres.



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## What you can do

### Restaurants:

1. Stop offering real shark fin soup and inform WWF of your positive action
2. Promote artificial shark fin substitute products at your restaurants and start a new, green eating trend by offering "alternative" shark fins made of materials with similar texture, such as seaweed extracts or animal tendon
3. Refer to the WWF *Seafood Guide* in selecting seafood, so that you can offer a responsible menu for customers who care about our environment

### Consumers:

1. Stop eating real shark fins. Tell your host of banquets and corporate functions in advance where shark fins are likely to be served that you do not want this dish
2. Consider eating artificial shark fin products as an alternative
3. Check against the WWF *Seafood Guide* before purchasing seafood. Reject those in the "avoid" category, and play your part in saving our oceans



### Corporations and other organisations:

Join our call to stop eating shark fins at your corporate functions to set a good example for the Hong Kong community. Do inform us of any company pledges so that we can highlight community leaders on our website.

What is the true cost for these fins?

stripped of their