



Talking points --- Sharks and Rays

Forget Jaws, it's the sharks that should be afraid! We kill over 100 million of them every year through bycatch or for their meat and fins. As top Ocean predators – not to mention lucrative tourist attractions – sharks are worth far more alive than dead; it should not take their extinction for us to figure that out. Sharks and rays need local sanctuaries, regional management, international protection, and changing cultural perceptions of products like shark fin soup and ray gill plates, if these magnificent animals are to survive.

(Note: messaging should not focus only on shark finning)

- Sharks and their cousins – rays - are enormously threatened by overfishing and illegal fishing.
- These beautiful marine animals, which are essential for Ocean health, are becoming severely depleted with as yet, unknown repercussions.
- Just like top predators on land keep an ecosystem in balance, so too do sharks across the Ocean. Healthy reefs need sharks and healthy reefs are not only critical for healthy fish populations which in turn help ensure food security for coastal populations; but they also help shore-up resilience to climate change impacts like major storm events.
- The numbers of sharks killed each year are staggering - with recent studies estimating that at least 100 million sharks are killed each and every year from reported and unreported landings, discards, and shark finning (Worm et al. 2013, Global catches, exploitation rates, and rebuilding options for sharks).
- The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species has assessed the extinction risk of 465 species of sharks around the world. Of those, the status of 45% (209 species) is unknown due to lack of data. Among those species with enough information to determine their conservation status, 55% (141 species) are threatened or near threatened with extinction. Dulvy et al. 2014, Extinction Risk and Conservation of the World's Sharks and Rays.
- Both sharks and rays are deliberately hunted for fins, body parts (for traditional Asian medicine cures) for their meat, bones, oil and cartilage.
- But the main reason for shark declines: their fins are valuable commercially and are principally used in shark fin soup, an important dish in China, Hong Kong, and other Asian countries and territories.
- This issue is not about vilifying a culture or way of life but is simple arithmetic - sharks will become extinct at the current rates of exploitation.

- A combination of their being long-lived, slow to reproduce with few offspring compared with most other fish species and the global onslaught from fishing that they face, is hindering their survival in the face of these threats.
- Without immediate action, many of the large sharks in the world will face global extinction in the coming decades.
- The lack of available data– sharks don't have passports and are hard to track – results in little to no management of shark populations, and thus overfishing continues. Sharks simply cannot keep up with the current rate of exploitation.
- Sharks are worth more alive than dead for economies –this of particular relevance for tourism destinations. A live reef shark can fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars in dive tourism revenue over the course of its lifetime. A dead shark can fetch a one-time payment of a couple of hundred dollars.
- In Palau, the estimated value of a live reef shark for the tourism industry is U.S. \$1.9 million per year. The estimated value of a reef shark caught and killed is U.S. \$109. (Vianna et al. 2011, Wanted dead or alive: The relative value of reef sharks as a fishery and an ecotourism asset in Palau).
- Shark and ray conservation requires action at local, regional and international levels due to the international nature and complexity of the trade, their migratory patterns, and the mobility of the global fishing fleet.
- Countries around the world export shark products to various hubs, with Hong Kong the current global hub of the shark fin trade.
- Many businesses have taken shark fin out of their supply chain. The Asian business community in particular has led the way.
- A group of Chinese entrepreneurs spearheaded the call to ban shark fin from Chinese government banquets, and the Shangri-La and Peninsula hotel groups were the first to publicly announce their decision to remove shark fin from menus. With these accounting for up to 50% of all shark fin soup served in China, this was a huge step.
- Today, many more hotels have removed shark fin from their menus, with the Marriott and Hilton recent additions. More should follow suit.
- Airlines are also refusing to transport shark fin and other shark products. Since Cathay Pacific announced its restrictive cargo policy on the transport of shark fin in September 2012, more than 36 airlines have followed suit, including Air China, which is the first Chinese mainland carrier to ban shark fin cargo.
- Shipping companies are also starting to follow suit, with 17 shipping lines prohibiting the transport of shark fin and other shark and ray products. FedEx remains one of the companies that have yet to stop transporting shark products.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

- Saving sharks will take a multi-pronged approach.
- World leaders have begun to stand up and take action to protect sharks and keep them in the world's Oceans. To date (January 2017), fifteen countries' waters have been designated as "shark sanctuaries" where shark fishing and trade is prohibited. These sanctuaries cover an area of 19 million square kilometres.
- Small island nations – big Ocean states - have led the way on shark protections, and continue to be shark champions because they understand how vital sharks are to their economies.
- Countries are also beginning to take measures to protect rays and many shark sanctuaries also protect rays. (Peru/Indonesia, Mexico, Ecuador, and the U.S. State of Hawaii).
- A number of conservation groups and experts have developed a 10-year strategy to prevent shark extinctions and ensure that shark fishing becomes sustainable and responsible.
- Local protections like shark sanctuaries; bans on the catching of sharks and trade in shark products, in tandem with a reduction in consumption, alongside a change in the perceived status of shark fin are needed.
- Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOS) are also implementing conservation measures to reduce the global mortality of sharks. However, their efforts thus far have not been comprehensive and much more can still be done.
- Until measures are in place to ensure that both targeted and incidental catch of sharks is sustainable, their capture should be avoided, and they should be released alive whenever possible.
- Fishing gear that increases the likelihood of shark catch, such as wire leaders and shark lines, should be prohibited, and research should be undertaken to determine the best means of avoiding shark catch.
- The Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) also provides another way to ensure that the trade of shark products is well managed and sustainable. A CITES listing is a very valuable tool to protect species from overexploitation due to international trade, as well as discouraging illegal trade.
- In 2013, five species of shark and two species of manta ray were added onto Appendix II of CITES.
- In 2016 CITES conference agreed to officially list 9 species of devil rays, 3 thresher sharks and the silky shark under CITES Appendix II, which obligates Parties to put in place international trade restrictions to ensure exports are sustainable and legal.