

## Ecology Action Centre position statement on shark fin bans

The Marine Issues Committee of the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) works to support the protection and conservation of all shark species, most of which have low reproductive rates and are highly vulnerable to pressures from overfishing. The EAC fully supports measures that reduce the number of sharks that are killed unsustainably and wastefully. This includes: immediately establishing catch limits on all vulnerable, threatened, and endangered species to reduce current mortality levels; ensuring that 'finning', the practice of removing shark fins at sea and dumping the carcass, is illegal globally; adoption of regulations that require sharks to be landed at the wharf with their fins naturally attached to their body; measures to restrict the trade and sale of fins and shark products until such a time as there are transparent, monitored supply chains and such products can be acquired from closely regulated, sustainable fisheries. Currently, this is not the case in the largely unmonitored and often illegal shark fin trade. There are very few sustainable shark fisheries in the world that the Ecology Action Centre can confidently support.

Therefore, the Ecology Action Centre supports bans on shark fin trade as an imperfect, but important tool amongst many that can be used to address threats to shark populations and create incentives for the fishing industry to adopt strict regulations, sustainable practices, and transparent supply chains.

It is important to note that the primary threats to shark populations in Canadian waters are the lack of science-based management and the loss of many sharks to numerous fisheries as 'bycatch' (either kept or discarded) that is largely unmonitored and unregulated in terms of mortality estimates and catch limits based on biological production. Bycatch poses an equally severe and global threat to shark species as the fin trade. Shark fin bans will not address this key threat. Thus, it is regulating bycatch and directed shark fishing that the Ecology Action Centre finds crucial for effective shark conservation.

There is some controversy about the effectiveness of shark fin trade and sale bans and the fairness of considering all fisheries equally complicit in unsustainable and illegal shark fin trading. While we acknowledge that this is a complicated issue, our position to support them as a tool at this juncture is based on consideration of the following:

- Globally, shark populations face significant threats. Major declines in shark stocks have been recorded—some species have been depleted by over 90% in the past 30 years. The shark fin trade is the leading source of demand for shark products and drives most directed shark fishing activities. Prohibiting possession and trade of shark fins may remove the key incentive for directed shark fishing and retention of shark bycatch.
- Despite robust fisheries, bycatch, and trade of shark species, fisheries management of sharks at the international level is practically nonexistent and country-specific management is usually inadequate. There are millions of sharks entering global trade from unregulated sources.
- Even countries that do have regulations on shark fishing activities face problems with enforcement. For example, it is illegal to 'fin' sharks at sea in Canada. However, this is enforced through a complicated requirement for boats to land a certain weight ratio of fins to carcasses (fins are to be 5% of total weight of shark carcasses), rather than a simple requirement to keep fins naturally attached to the body until landing. Poor monitoring and lack of enforcement allow loopholes to be exploited and illegal fins to make their way into the market..
- There is usually no cost-effective way to distinguish which species shark fins are from once they have been removed from the body and dried. This means there is no way to differentiate fins from possibly well-managed fisheries from those caught illegally.

### Marine Program

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We acknowledge that shark products could potentially come from well-managed fisheries with meaningful, scientific regulations in place. The EAC supports sustainable fisheries and will continue to do so in the future. However, the scale and urgency of the threats facing so many shark species requires that the burden be placed on a fishery to demonstrate sustainability, and to provide a way to identify its products and prevent fraudulent labeling. If a demonstrably sustainable shark product were introduced, we would support its production and consumption. Until the fishing industry has taken that step, we will continue to support the efforts to reduce shark fin product demand, the primary threat to shark species worldwide, 30% of which are threatened, or near threatened, with extinction.

There is an effort in Canada to introduce a federal ban on the import of shark fins. While we support the intentions of the individuals working to introduce such regulations, we have concerns about the effectiveness of this strategy. A ban on imports could create a strong incentive to target domestic shark species in the future to fulfill product demand once existing fins in the market have been consumed. Canada's current regulations of shark catch are woefully inadequate with no meaningful catch limits on most species and no requirement that sharks must be landed with their fins naturally attached. Canada is also the only country in the Atlantic to maintain a directed fishery for the endangered porbeagle shark. There is wide latitude for increased exploitation of Canada's shark species under the current lack of regulations despite the fact that our key commercially fished sharks have been assessed as threatened. Landings of sharks in Canada already fluctuate according to domestic and export market demands. This means that a spike in demand for a domestic source of shark fins could easily lead to a rise in shark landings and an increase in efforts to exploit the loopholes of the current '5% ratio' fin landing rule to meet demand for fins domestically and for export. Until Canada adopts effective practices for the management of shark landings and bycatch, the Ecology Action Centre is concerned that an import ban on fins alone will not offer an adequate solution to Canada's involvement in the shark fin trade, nor will it ensure future stability for shark populations.

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