

Open letter:

As professional marine scientists who have personally witnessed and documented the dramatic declines of shark populations around the world, we would like to express our concern about the recent misinformation perpetuated in the media, both Asian and international, asserting that the shark fin trade is sustainable. The reality is that this vast trade is largely unmanaged and unmonitored, and that the shark fin industry in Asia plays little to no role in fisheries management in the countries that are fishing sharks. The slow growth and reproductive rates of sharks makes them extremely susceptible to overexploitation. Since only a small fraction of shark-fishing nations have any type of shark management plan in place, the assertion that the fin trade is sustainable is not based in fact.

Despite recent claims to the contrary by the Hong Kong-based Sustainable Marine Resources Committee of the Marine Products Association (MPA), there is a wealth of scientific evidence that populations of many shark species are in decline, with the shark fin trade being an important driver. There is a solid scientific consensus that many sharks and indeed other cartilaginous fishes, such as skates and rays, are in severe trouble, and there is emerging evidence that this could be causing wider disruptions in ocean ecosystems.

We the undersigned believe, in the interests of both the global marine environment and the public that depends on healthy ocean ecosystems, that decision makers should be apprised of the full facts of the shark fin issue, most specifically that:

- **The shark fin trade, as it currently stands, is NOT sustainable.** Peer-reviewed scientific research has shown that the fins of tens of millions of sharks passed through the shark fin trade in 2000. Since then there has been no accurate estimation of the trade volume and corresponding number of sharks killed, making it impossible for the industry to state that the trade is sustainable. Declines in shark populations have been reported from many locations worldwide, and many areas like the Caribbean, for example, are heavily impacted. Individual populations, such as oceanic whitetip sharks in the Gulf of Mexico and hammerheads in the Mediterranean, have experienced severe declines. These statistics are not mere speculation but are backed up by published analyses in academic journals.
- **Shark fins are by far the most valuable part of the shark, which encourages many fisheries to target them or retain them even when they are caught incidentally, rather than releasing them alive.** The shark fin trade should therefore be viewed as a major driver of global shark fishing activities, which are often unmanaged and conducted in an unsustainable manner.
- **The UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) does NOT adequately protect endangered shark species.** The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists 82 species of sharks on its Red List of Threatened Species as Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered. Yet, CITES regulates trade of just three of these threatened shark species. Despite meeting the scientific criteria for listing, numerous shark species have been denied CITES protection because politics prevented them from receiving the two-thirds of the votes necessary for a CITES listing. A larger number of species are considered threatened and are therefore prohibited in particular countries or by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations. CITES tends to lag behind domestic and regional management bodies because of the 2/3 majority requirement and should not therefore be used as the benchmark for whether a species is under threat.

In short, the overwhelming body of scientific data supports the urgent need to focus on adequate conservation and management strategies rather than maintaining unsustainable levels of fishing.

Given that sharks play an important role in maintaining the delicate balance of the world's marine ecosystems, and that many species of sharks are now threatened or near threatened with extinction, there is a rare opportunity to make a significant impact on an issue of global importance by helping to regulate the burgeoning international trade in shark fins.

Yours sincerely,

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