

Fact Sheet

Assembly Bill 376 (FONG/HUFFMAN): Promote healthy shark populations & oceans



Shark fins for sale in San Francisco (Credit: The HSUS)

The goal of AB 376 is to save sharks and the oceans by banning the possession, sale, trade and distribution of shark fins.

Every year fins from tens of millions of sharks are used for shark fin soup.¹ The human appetite for shark fins has been a major contributor to the near-collapse of shark populations worldwide, including in California. Current federal and California laws banning shark finning control shark handling practices but do not restrict the number of sharks killed and thus do not address the issue of the shark fin trade.

One of the most effective ways to protect sharks by reducing the number killed is to eliminate the market for fins by prohibiting their sale. AB 376 will ensure that California ceases to contribute to the supply and demand for shark fin through a ban on the possession (save for those with valid shark fishing/research permits), sale, trade and distribution of shark fins. A similar ban was enacted in Hawaii in 2010 and in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands in early 2011. Similar legislation is now under review by the Guam, Oregon, and Washington state legislatures.

SHARKS ARE KEY TO HEALTHY OCEANS

As predators at or near the top of marine food webs, sharks help maintain the balance of marine life in our oceans. Research shows that the massive depletion of sharks has cascading effects throughout the oceans' ecosystems.² Complicating matters, sharks are particularly vulnerable to overfishing because they are slow to reach reproductive maturity and produce very few offspring. AB 376 will give critical protection to sharks and preserve the health of California's and the world's ocean ecosystems and biodiversity.



Great white shark (Credit: Monterey Bay Aquarium)



SHARKS ARE IN TROUBLE

The demand for fins drives the cruel practice of shark finning. The fins are cut off, often while the animal is still alive, and then the shark is thrown back into the sea. No longer able to swim, the mutilated shark sinks to the bottom of the ocean and may not die immediately. Without fins, sharks will bleed to death, drown, or are eaten by other animals. This ruthless practice, which remains legal in many parts of the world, is dangerously efficient because it enables fishing crews to throw out low-value, unwanted and unmarketable shark carcasses and retain only the fins. Shark finning allows shark hunters to fish for sharks far longer than if they had to keep space onboard for the whole shark. Sharks have inhabited our oceans for 400 million years and yet scientists warn that shark populations are dwindling and cannot sustain the current slaughter rates. The International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species estimates that 30 percent of pelagic (open ocean) sharks are threatened with extinction.³

CALIFORNIA JOINS A REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SHARK PROTECTION TREND

California represents a significant market for shark fins in the United States, and this demand helps drive the practice of shark finning and declining shark populations. According to a 2005 report to Congress by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, San Diego and Los Angeles are two of the top U.S. entry points for shark fin imports.⁴ Given that most of the fins are processed in Asia and then exported around the world, fins currently

imported and sold in California could have come from any of the dozens of countries that sell fins to East Asia, many of which continue to fin sharks. AB 376, which seeks to ban the possession, sale, trade and distribution of shark fins in California, will eliminate the supply of shark fins here and end our state's involvement in the highly destructive global shark fin trade.



Shark fins drying

Increasingly, national governments and international fishery conventions are recognizing the urgency to save sharks by implementing progressive protection measures. The UK and several Latin American governments have adopted regulations outlawing removal of a shark's fins on board a fishing vessel. Federal and state laws prohibiting the practice of shark finning do not directly address the trade in fins, yet states are not federally preempted from doing so.

Thousands of years of Asian philosophy emphasize the importance of harmony between nature and humanity. Although shark fin soup has long been a popular entrée because of its association with prestige and privilege, concerned individuals across Asia – including China, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong – have formed shark protection groups to highlight the plight of sharks. Some governments and businesses in the Pacific region have pledged to not serve shark fin soup at government functions, business meetings, and celebratory banquets. Likewise, a growing number of globally recognized Asian chefs support alternatives to shark fin. Respected Asian Pacific American leaders, elected officials, celebrities, and advocates have joined in support for AB 376.

AB 376 will greatly complement the global and regional trend toward shark conservation and reaffirm California's leadership in shark and ocean protection.

¹ S. Clarke, et al., "Global estimates of shark catches using trade records from commercial markets," *Ecology Letters*, 9:10, Blackwell Publishing Ltd/CNRS, 2006, pp. 1115-1126, www.iccs.org.uk/papers/Clarke2006EcologyLetters.pdf

² Myers, R.A., Baum, J.K., Shepherd, T.D., Powers, S.P. and Peterson, C.H. 2007. Cascading effects of the loss of apex predatory sharks from a coastal ocean. *Science* 315: 1846-1850

³ IUCN press release, June 25, 2009. "Third of open ocean sharks threatened with extinction." <http://www.iucn.org/?3362/Third-of-open-ocean-sharks-threatened-with-extinction>

⁴ 2005 Report to Congress, Pursuant to the Shark Finning Prohibition Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-577), US Dept of Commerce, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration. Page 16. http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/domes_fish/ReportsToCongress/SharkFinningReport05.pdf