

September 21, 2018 • [In the Lab](#) • By [Asian Scientist Newsroom](#)

# Shark Fins Need To Be Struck Off The Menu, Scientists Say

Poor regulatory oversight has allowed the shark fin trade to run rampant and threaten endangered shark species, said researchers in Hong Kong and Canada.

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AsianScientist (Sep. 21, 2018) – An international research group has found that the shark fin trade continues to threaten already-endangered shark species. They reported their findings in *Marine Policy*.

Research suggests that global shark catches now exceed one million tons per year, more than double what they were six decades ago. This overexploitation now threatens almost 60 percent of shark species, the highest proportion among all vertebrate groups. In the present study, researchers at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), the University of British Columbia (UBC) and WildAid Hong Kong found that poor regulatory oversight has allowed fishing pressure on threatened shark populations to increase dramatically in recent years.

“Hong Kong is the port of entry for about half of all officially traded dried shark fins globally, importing around 6,000 tons per year in recent years,” Professor Yvonne Sadovy of HKU explained.

The researchers estimated that only 12 percent of shark fisheries are considered potentially sustainable, indicating that 25,000 tons of dried fins each year originate from other unsustainable, often illegal, fisheries. It is extremely difficult to track the original source of shark fins because many fins look similar and the mixing of shark catches is a common practice by the industry.

“Shark finning and the mixing of catches tend to take place in the open seas or in remote ports, where there is little to no oversight. Moreover, authorities show little interest in controlling illegal wildlife trade, including that in shark fins. Even if they do, their enforcement capabilities are very limited because they cannot inspect and run DNA tests on every single fin that arrives at their customs to determine the area where the shark was caught, or even determine the species,” said co-author Professor Daniel Pauly at UBC.

A large proportion of fins comes from sharks caught as bycatch. For example, sharks comprise over 25 percent of the total catch in longline tuna and billfish fisheries in multiple countries. While there are ways to mitigate biologically unsustainable or environmentally harmful shark bycatch, these methods are neither widely adopted nor strictly enforced.

The researchers also highlighted that available enforcement and compliance systems are far too poorly applied for wildlife trade in most countries trading fins.

“Consumers have to act fast and decide what is acceptable and what is not when it comes to vulnerable, uncontrolled species. Traditions change all the time according to new knowledge and shifting values. So while the appetite for shark fin soup is growing in places like Thailand and Macau, it is slowly declining in Hong Kong and mainland China, where young people are starting to see it as a cultural practice that is worth abandoning,” said Pauly.

“Extinction must not make the decision for us,” added Sadovy who is the lead author of the study. “We must either control ourselves to ensure sustainable exploitation and trade, or stop trade in luxury species or products that seriously threaten their future on our planet.”

The article can be found at: Sadovy et al. (2018) Out of Control Means Off the Menu: the Case for Ceasing Consumption of Luxury Products From Highly Vulnerable Species When International Trade Cannot Be Adequately Controlled; Shark Fin as a Case Study.

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Source: University of Hong Kong; Photo: Yvonne Sadovy. Disclaimer: This article does not necessarily reflect the views of AsianScientist or its staff.

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