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A shark is weighed in New Bedford, Massachusetts, as part of the North Atlantic Monster Shark Tournament. Recreational shark hunting accounts for a growing proportion of shark catches. Credit: Maddie Meyer/Getty

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## Fishing for fun takes a massive bite out of marine life

The volume of fish caught recreationally more than tripled in the 60 years to 2014, and a recent uptick in recreational shark hunting is damaging fragile populations.

The United Nations agency that documents fishing statistics almost exclusively monitors commercial fisheries. To quantify the impact of pleasure fishing, Dirk Zeller at the University of Western Australia in Crawley and his colleagues reconstructed the amount of fish caught annually in 125 countries. The researchers analysed reports from events such as fishing jamborees and gathered data on factors such as the number of licensed recreational fishers per state to scale up to a global estimate.

The results showed that recreational catches increased from about 280,000 tonnes in the mid-1950s to around 900,000 tonnes in 2014. The hunting of sharks and rays for fun has been rising more steeply than other forms of recreational fishing since 1990, and now accounts for up to 6% of recreational catches worldwide. Although shark hunters often release the fish, a previous study of hammerhead sharks found that the majority of fish that were hooked and released died before reaching reproductive age.

[\*Front. Mar. Sci.\* \(2020\)](#)

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