

Chefs and Restaurant Owners Call on Congress to Pass the Shark Fin Trade Elimination Act

As chefs and restaurant owners, we are committed to ensuring the food we serve is good for the planet and for our customers. This includes supporting practices that do not contribute to the demand for unsustainable food products or harvesting practices.

One practice stands above others in terms of its wastefulness and cruelty—shark finning. This process involves cutting the fins off of a shark and discarding its body at sea, where it dies a slow death from drowning, bleeding to death, or even being eaten alive by other fish.

The demand for shark fins is primarily driven by the market for shark fin soup, which is considered a luxury item in some Asian cuisines. In fact, it is estimated that fins from as many as 73 million sharks end up in the global shark fin trade every year.

This is especially troubling since shark populations are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Many of the species targeted for their fins tend to have long lifespans, mature slowly, and produce relatively few young, making them slow to recover from unsustainable fishing. Some shark populations around the world have declined by more than 90 percent, with between 63 and 273 million sharks killed every year.

Sharks have important ecological value, playing critical roles in structuring ocean food webs. This means that declines in shark populations can create a domino effect of unintended consequences, including the possibility of damaging other seafood populations that consumers like to eat.

While shark finning is banned in U.S. waters, it is still legal to buy, sell and trade shark fins throughout parts of the country. By allowing the trade of shark fins within our borders, the U.S. continues to contribute to this global problem.

Simply put, there is no reason to serve shark fins in restaurants in our country.

Twelve states and three U.S. territories have all already banned the sale or trade of most shark fins. The Chinese government has stopped serving shark fin soup at official government banquets. Private companies are also refusing to ship or sell shark fin products, including Amazon, GrubHub, many hotels and major airlines, Hong Kong Disneyland and multiple shipping companies. However, as companies and states close the door on the shark fin trade, other doors remain open, and the market shifts accordingly. A nationwide ban would eliminate the U.S. market entirely, and this game of shark fin ban whack-a-mole would end.

A national ban on shark fins would also reinforce the status of the United States as a leader in shark conservation, setting an example for the rest of the world. Shark finning is wasteful, inhumane and a threat to sharks.

A poll released last year by conservation group Oceana revealed that eight in 10 Americans (81 percent) support a ban on the trade of shark fins in the United States. We agree – there’s no place for shark fins in the United States. It’s time to make it official.

Sincerely,

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