

A close-up photograph of a woven basket filled with various shark fins and other marine products. The fins are of different sizes and shapes, some appearing fresh and others more processed. The basket is made of a light-colored, textured material, possibly straw or bamboo. The background is dark and out of focus.

# Shark Fin Trade: Why it Should Be Banned in the United States

# Fins from as many as 73 million sharks end up in the global shark fin trade every year

Sharks are caught and killed faster than they can reproduce. In fact, scientists estimate sharks are killed, on average, 30 percent faster than they can replace themselves, and because of this, nearly one in four species are threatened with extinction.

One of the greatest threats facing sharks is the demand for their fins. This demand has led to the wasteful and inhumane practice of shark finning – 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. Many of these fins are used in shark fin soup, which is considered a delicacy in some Asian countries. In fact, fins from as many as 73 million sharks end up in the shark fin trade every year. Between 2000 and 2011, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), reported an average of 16,815 metric tons of shark fins were traded around the world. 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.

In 2010, to protect sharks and prevent loopholes in current law, Congress enacted the Shark Conservation Act, requiring that sharks landed in the United States must have their fins naturally attached to their bodies. However, despite this positive step, shark fins continue to be bought and sold in the United States. Since 2010, the United States has imported fins from 11 countries, five of which have no prohibitions on shark finning.

Once fins have been detached from the body of a shark, it is difficult to know whether they came from sharks legally caught for their meat in a sustainably managed fishery or from illegal, unmanaged and unsustainable fisheries. A national prohibition on shark fins would reduce the international fin trade, improve enforcement of the current finning ban, and perhaps most importantly, reinforce the status of the United States as a leader in shark conservation. For all of these reasons, Congress should prohibit the sale and trade of all shark fins and shark fin products in the United States.

As predators, sharks have played a vital role in maintaining healthy oceans for hundreds of millions of years, and any decline in populations can create a domino effect of unintended consequences. Sharks were swimming in our oceans before dinosaurs walked the earth, but unless we take the necessary steps to protect them, we may be on a path toward eliminating some of these amazing predators.

## 14 Most Common Shark Species Involved in the Hong Kong Fin Trade

More than 70 percent of these species are considered at high or very high risk of extinction (endangered or vulnerable).



Common Name	IUCN Red List Status	IUCN Trend
<b>BLUE</b> 	! (Near Threatened)	? (Unknown)
<b>SHORTFIN MAKO</b> 	!! (Vulnerable)	↓ (Decreasing)
<b>SILKY</b> 	! (Near Threatened)	↓ (Decreasing)
<b>DUSKY</b> 	!! (Vulnerable)	↓ (Decreasing)
<b>SANDBAR</b> 	!! (Vulnerable)	↓ (Decreasing)
<b>TIGER</b> 	! (Near Threatened)	? (Unknown)
<b>SCALLOPED HAMMERHEAD</b> 	!!! (Endangered)	? (Unknown)
<b>SMOOTH HAMMERHEAD</b> 	!! (Vulnerable)	↓ (Decreasing)
<b>GREAT HAMMERHEAD</b> 	!!! (Endangered)	↓ (Decreasing)
<b>COMMON THRESHER</b> 	!! (Vulnerable)	↓ (Decreasing)
<b>BIGEYE THRESHER</b> 	!! (Vulnerable)	↓ (Decreasing)
<b>PELAGIC THRESHER</b> 	!! (Vulnerable)	↓ (Decreasing)
<b>BULL</b> 	! (Near Threatened)	? (Unknown)
<b>OCEANIC WHITETIP</b> 	!! (Vulnerable)	↓ (Decreasing)

# Sharks are Important to Tourism

Shark watchers spend an estimated \$314 million on shark ecotourism every year



## Shark Fin Imports to the United States (2010-2015)

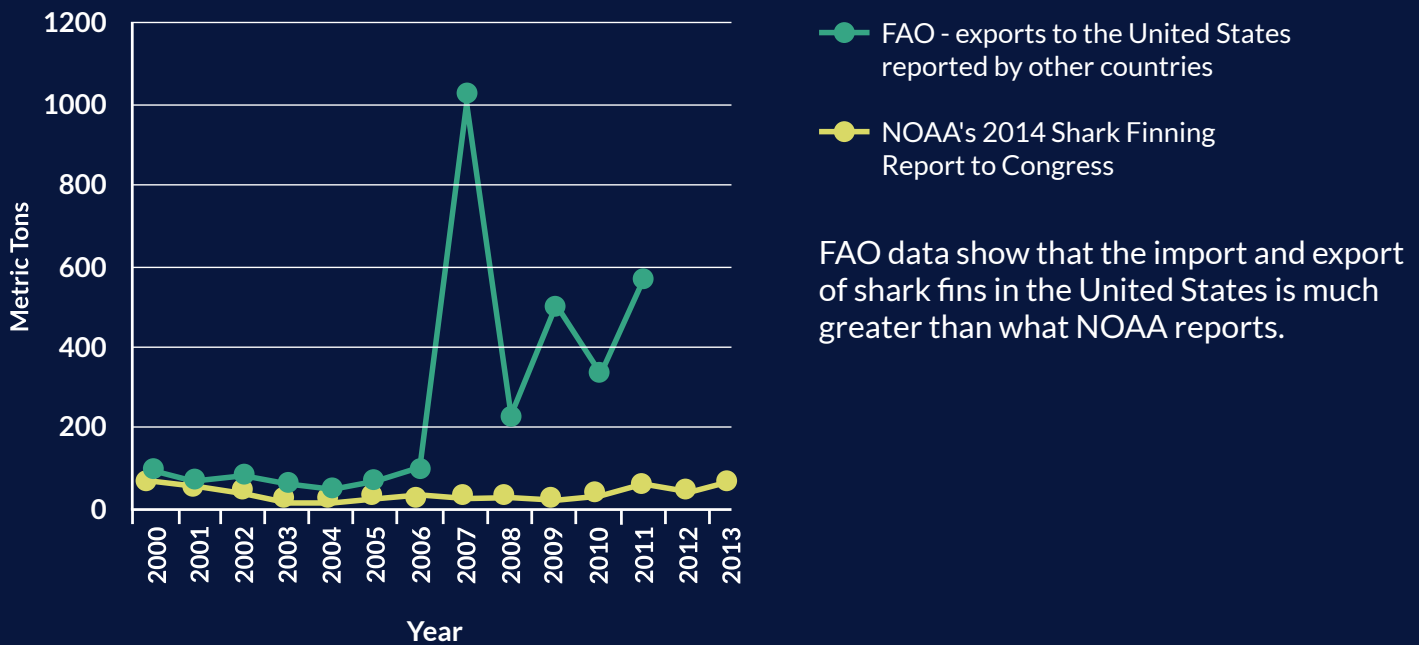
COUNTRIES WE IMPORT FROM	FINNING BAN?	TYPE OF BAN
China	No	
China, Hong Kong	No	
Indonesia	No	
Japan	No	
Thailand	No	
Australia	Yes	Some states/territories require Fins Naturally Attached
New Zealand	Yes	Fins Naturally Attached or Ratio species dependent
Spain	Yes	Fins Naturally Attached
India	Yes	Fins Naturally Attached
South Africa	Yes	Fins Naturally Attached
Taiwan Province of China	Yes	Fins Naturally Attached



Jeff Litton

# Discrepancies in Shark Fin Data

## Imports of Shark Fins Into the United States



## How many shark fins are actually being imported into the United States?

According to the FAO, other countries reported exporting 1,012 metric tons of shark fins to the United States in 2007. However, that same year, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

(NOAA) only reported 28.8 metric tons of shark fin imports. Similar discrepancies appear in U.S.-reported exports. In 2011, NOAA reported 38 metric tons of shark fin exports from the United States, yet according to the FAO, other countries reported importing 295 metric tons of shark fins from the United States. Much of this confusion can be attributed to a complex array of labeling rules and commodity codes. The United States requires shark fins to be labeled as shark fins only if they are dried. So if shark fins are “wet”—fresh, frozen, on ice or processed in any way other

than being dried—the sellers or processors do not have to label them as “shark fins.” This limited requirement has implications beyond the inconsistencies of import/export data. Under current regulations, there is almost no way of knowing if a fin was removed from a managed fishery like the Australian gummy shark or the Atlantic blacktip, or from a species that is considered endangered or vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), like a scalloped hammerhead, great white or whale shark.

## Recommendations

In light of the deficiencies in shark fin trade data, inconsistencies in regulations among foreign countries, and the threatened nature of many shark species, the only way to ensure that the United States is not supporting shark finning would be an outright ban of the trade in shark fin products in the United States.

Currently, 10 states in the United States, as well as American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands and Guam, 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, and many private companies are also refusing to ship or sell shark fin products. However, as companies and states close the door on the shark fin trade, other doors remain open, and the market shifts accordingly. Right now, it is impossible to know if a shark fin in the United States is a product of finning. National legislation banning the trade of shark fins would remove that uncertainty.

Additionally, a nationwide ban on shark fins would reinforce the status of the United States as a leader in shark conservation, sending a message to other countries that the United States recognizes shark finning as a cruel process that should not be allowed to continue. Shark finning is wasteful, inhumane and a threat to sharks' continued survival. There's no place for shark fins in the United States, and it's time to make that official.

For Oceana's full report, please visit [oceana.org/FinBanNow](http://oceana.org/FinBanNow).