



## **Myths and Facts about Canada's Current Shark Fin Import Laws**

In response to widespread public calls for a federal shark fin import ban, some elected representatives have made claims suggesting that Private Member's Bill C-380 to ban the import of shark fins into Canada is unnecessary because Canada's current import laws go far enough in ensuring that Canada does not participate in the global shark fin trade that is decimating threatened shark populations. The following is a factual analysis of those claims:

**Myth:** *Canada bans or restricts the trade, possession or sale of shark products from species which are protected under either the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) or the Species at Risk Act (SARA), so Canada doesn't need a federal ban on imports of shark fins to Canada.*

**Fact:** This is false. Neither CITES nor SARA provide protection for the majority of threatened shark species, as together they only protect three species of sharks: basking sharks, whale sharks and great white sharks. The conservation status of sharks is determined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which classifies 67 shark species as Near-Threatened and 74 shark species as Threatened<sup>1</sup>, including all 14 shark species that are most actively targeted for the shark fin trade. This means that out of 141 threatened or near-threatened shark species, only three are protected by Canadian federal laws. Even for those three species, there is little to no actual enforcement of the relevant import restrictions in Canada. Shark fins are not labeled by species or country of origin, and many endangered sharks continue to be killed for their fins.<sup>2</sup> The fins of those sharks are traded all over the world, including in Canada<sup>3</sup>. DNA testing on samples taken from 59 specimens of shark fin sold in the Vancouver area in 2012 revealed that 76% of the fins were from species that are listed as threatened or endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.<sup>4</sup> Even if shark fins were labeled, a Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans report indicates that our customs officers are generally not trained to be familiar with species names and have only seconds to review long lists of species

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iucnredlist.org/search>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bloomassociation.org/?q=hk/shark-consumption-trade>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.cisc.gc.ca/annual\\_reports/annual\\_report\\_2009/environmental\\_crime\\_2009\\_e.html](http://www.cisc.gc.ca/annual_reports/annual_report_2009/environmental_crime_2009_e.html)

<sup>4</sup> <http://bc.ctvnews.ca/endangered-shark-fins-sold-in-vancouver-probe-1.1066345>

identified on customs documentation.<sup>5</sup> Without a ban on the importation of shark fins into Canada, there is simply no way to ensure the fins of threatened shark species do not enter the country.

**Myth:** *Canada bans or restricts the trade, possession or sale of shark products that present human health or safety concerns.*

**Fact:** This is false. Shark fins, which continue to be legally imported into Canada, contain high concentrations of a potent neurotoxin, BMAA, which scientists have linked to neurodegenerative diseases in humans such as Alzheimer's and Lou Gherig Disease (ALS)<sup>6</sup>.

**Myth:** *Working through regional fisheries management organizations to ensure strong global management and enforcement practices is the most effective way to prevent unsustainable shark fishing practices such as finning.*

**Fact:** This is false. While there are ongoing global efforts to restrict the practice of shark finning, as long as there is a demand for shark fins, there will be local industry pressure on governments not to prohibit the practice. Moreover, demand for shark fins will perpetuate poaching of sharks in the waters of countries which already prohibit finning and continues to provide an incentive for finning in foreign waters or high seas where there is no finning ban or lax enforcement. Canada has already been clearly identified by the Criminal Intelligence Service of Canada (CSIS) as a destination country for poached shark fins from Australia<sup>7</sup>, despite the fact that some Australian states have some of the world's strongest shark finning laws. Much of Canada's shark fin is imported from Spain, whose shark fishing laws have significant loopholes to allow finning of sharks; even those weak laws are often broken, including by one of the countries largest fishing fleets, which was found to have illegally fished over € 1 million worth of shark fins in 2011<sup>8</sup>. Eliminating demand removes the incentive for fishermen to continue finning and poaching sharks.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/coe-cde/ceara/docs/Gerson\\_pub1.pdf](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/coe-cde/ceara/docs/Gerson_pub1.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.rsmas.miami.edu/news-events/press-releases/2012/neurotoxins-in-shark-fins-a-human-health-concern>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.cisc.gc.ca/annual\\_reports/annual\\_report\\_2009/environmental\\_crime\\_2009\\_e.html](http://www.cisc.gc.ca/annual_reports/annual_report_2009/environmental_crime_2009_e.html)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/spanish-fleet-accused-of-lawbreaking-lands-massive-eu-subsidies-2364366.html>

