



EU ban on shark finning

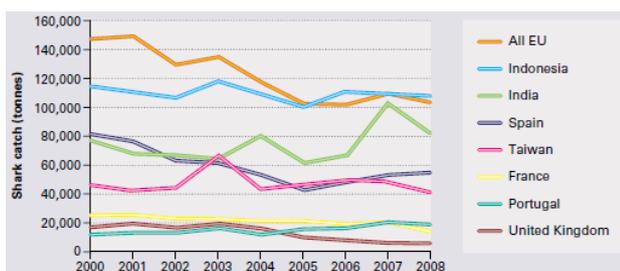
Some shark species have become threatened in recent years, including due to increased demand for shark products, in particular fins. Shark finning is the practice of removing fins and discarding the rest of the body at sea. Existing EU legislation bans shark finning, but allows for fins to be removed aboard vessels under certain conditions through Special Fishing Permits. The Commission proposes that this should no longer be possible.

Background

Many [shark species](#) are considered vulnerable to over-exploitation due to the fact that they grow slowly, mature at a late age, and have low rates of reproduction. The practice of shark finning – cutting off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea – is driven by the fact that shark fins are highly valuable as opposed to shark carcasses. Shark fins are [reported](#) to sell for between US\$20 and 90 (€15-70) per kilogramme on the Asian market, which is higher than the retail price of shark meat. [Experts](#) claim that shark finning is one of the factors that contribute to the pressure on shark populations. Finning and discard of shark carcasses is also [considered](#) a public [concern](#) because of the perceived cruelty to sharks if they are finned alive.

The EU is a major actor in global shark product markets. The EU's global shark catches rank second, after Indonesia (see Fig. 1). The EU has made several international commitments to protect sharks, in line with the [Food and Agriculture Organisation Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries](#), and in particular under the

Fig. 1 - Shark catches (tonnes/year) by major fishing nations 2000-2008



Source: FAO Fishstat as quoted in [Shark fins in Europe](#), S. Fowler, B. Séret.

[International Plan of Action on Sharks](#) (IPOA-Sharks). IPOA-Sharks was the basis for the 2009 Commission [Communication](#) on an [EU Action Plan for the Conservation and Management of Sharks](#), in which the EU committed itself to adopt all necessary measures for the conservation of sharks and to minimise waste and discards from shark catches.

Current situation

Although an EU shark finning ban was introduced in 2003, the [relevant Regulation](#) allows exemptions under certain conditions to vessels processing fish on board. Special Fishing Permits (SFP) can be delivered by Member States, allowing fins to be removed on board if all parts of the shark are retained. In this case, fins and bodies can be landed in different ports, but that makes controls difficult, given the varying levels of enforcement in ports around the world where such landings may take place. [Conservationists](#) argue that a number of loop-holes prevent the current Regulation from being fully effective. To date, the largest numbers of [SFPs](#) have been issued to Spanish and Portuguese [longliners](#) (respectively [1266](#) and 145 for the period 2004-2010). In the past, SFPs have been delivered by the UK, Germany and Lithuania, but since 2009, this is no longer the case.

Commission proposal

The new Commission [proposal](#) results from a [public consultation](#) and foresees that all vessels fishing in EU waters and all EU vessels fishing anywhere in the world will have to land sharks with their fins still attached. To facilitate storage and handling onboard, fishermen will be permitted to slice partly through each fin and fold it against the carcass of the shark.

Fisheries committee views

In [committee](#), MEPs voted to rule out exceptions allowing for SFPs, and thus oblige all vessels to land any sharks with their fins "naturally attached". The [draft report](#) was approved with 11 votes in favour, 10 against and 3 abstentions.