



# LESS CRUEL, LESS WASTEFUL STOPPING ILLEGAL SHARK FINNING

*The Greens' plan for protecting sharks from live finning*

It is supposed to be illegal in Australia yet sharks are still being captured, having their fins cut off, and then being dumped alive back into the ocean to slowly die. The government's poor record-keeping is hampering efforts to stop live finning.

Cruel and wasteful shark finning, sometimes involving killing of endangered shark species is increasing. Finning is supposed to be illegal, but a patchwork of different laws between the Commonwealth, State and Territories, and lack of any central source of figures for shark fin imports and exports, is undermining efforts to stop it.

## > STOPPING SHARK FINNING

Only the Greens can be trusted to help stop illegal shark finning.

The Australian Greens will make it a high priority to achieve as soon as possible:

- **Consistent laws**, so that all sharks caught in Australia must be landed with their fins still attached to their bodies.
- A **central data source** that records Australian sharks caught, species of caught sharks, and full details of shark fin imports and exports.
- A ban on the possession, sale and/or trade of imported shark fin in Australia. Appoint a Working Group to determine how to implement this policy.
- The Working Group will also evaluate the necessity of a moratorium on shark fishing in Commonwealth waters and an export ban, if these other measures prove to be ineffective.

## > THE CRUELTY OF SHARK FINNING

Sharks that have had their fins cut off and then been dumped back into the ocean alive die a slow and horrible death. Death is caused by starvation, being eaten alive by other fish, or drowning.

Finning is driven by the high price of shark fins compared with shark meat, with fins fetching up to 700 times the price. The destination of the fins is shark fin soup. The high price of fins is attributed to increasing demand for shark fin soup.

Shark fin soup is regarded as a top-end luxury dish, though it is increasingly being rejected on grounds of cruelty. Shark fins are not relied on as an ordinary food source due to their extreme expense.

Shark finning occurs in a context where sharks are already under enormous pressure. Almost half the world's shark species live in Australian waters. Nine of these are listed as threatened under our Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Internationally, a third of all open ocean sharks are endangered. Slow to reproduce and having few young, shark populations can crash as a result of overfishing, bycatch, finning, hunting, shark nets, habitat degradation and culls. Climate change is a new pressure and yet we have very little understanding about how this is affecting our sharks. Catching sharks mainly for their fins is believed to be the main reason for decline in shark species.

## > ALL LANDED SHARKS TO HAVE FINS ATTACHED

One way of reducing finning is to require that all sharks be landed with their fins attached to their bodies.

This was recommended in 2007 by the United Nations General Assembly, supported in 2012 by the European Union, suggested in a conservation plan that arose from the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (to which Australia is a signatory), and adopted in India (the world's second biggest shark catching nation) in August 2013.



In Australia, the Commonwealth, States and Territories have all made live shark finning illegal. But not all of them require sharks to be landed with fins attached. Some allow fins to be cut off at sea subject to a minimum ratio between fins and meat.

This patchwork of laws makes it needlessly difficult to monitor compliance with the ban on finning. The Greens will work collaboratively for a consistent “fins attached” policy across all Australian jurisdictions. This would help with monitoring and make the ban more effective. It would also improve identification of shark species caught, including whether any sharks caught are endangered species.

## > A CENTRAL DATA SOURCE OF SHARK LANDINGS AND SHARK FIN IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

Australia has no central source of data on sharks caught, shark fin imports and exports. Problems include: lack of distinguishing between shark products, lack of information about the source of imports (which effectively permits and does not distinguish imports from countries that allow live shark finning), and some export data is in hard copy and omitted from the electronic database.

Attempts to compare sharks caught with trade data have revealed gaping holes. Indeed, if the figures are to be believed, thousands of tonnes more of shark is traded than is caught.

If the figures are to be useful, they must be accurate. The Greens will work to achieve a central data base that shows sharks caught, including species (so that catching of endangered shark species can be identified), all shark fin imports and their sources and all shark fin exports. This will help to identify whether anti-finning strategies are working.

## > REGULAR EVALUATION OF WHETHER ANTI-FINNING STRATEGIES ARE WORKING

It is all very well to have a ban on finning and a range of anti-finning strategies, but if they are to be more than just lip service, there need to be regular checks on how well they are working. Barriers to their effectiveness include: the very high price of shark fins compared with shark meat, and the ease with which shark fins can be hidden on fishing vessels.

The central data source will help to capture information about the number of sharks caught and trade in fins. The Greens will make sure that the information is not merely recorded, but used to regularly assess the effectiveness of Australia’s anti-finning measures.

If the anti-finning measures are shown to not be protecting sharks, then the Working Group will be asked to provide advice on a moratorium of shark fishing in Commonwealth waters and the effectiveness of a ban on exports.

## > BANNING POSSESSION AND TRADE OF SHARK FINS

Some places, including several US States, have already banned possession, sale and trade of shark fins. There have been calls for Australia to do the same. The Greens will appoint a Working Group to identify and assess options for achieving a ban on possession, sale and/or trade of imported shark fin in Australia.