

Shark Crisis: Overview

While most people are aware of the plight of the charismatic ocean creatures, like dolphins, turtles and whales, few know of the shark's current fate. We are often blinded by misguided fears. Sharks are disappearing at an alarming rate – their numbers down by 95% in some regions – with many species facing extinction during our lifetimes.

Out of sight out of mind

This is why most people are surprised to learn that many shark species are almost extinct and nearly all are headed for disaster. But, you can't stop something so terrible from happening if you don't know about it. Or know why you should care.

Many don't know about this issue, because it happens so far away. Out in the oceans, in countries few of us will ever journey to, for a reason that is foreign to many of us. Far from our eyes and far from governmental protection – at seas too broad or expensive to patrol. We assume sharks are protected in marine reserves or that it is some other country's problem. Many of us may even live in countries in which certain types of shark fishing is illegal – though most likely it is still occurring right under our noses. In fact, the US and many countries in the EU are responsible for catching more sharks than most other countries in the world. For more information, read "**Issues Facing Sharks**" factsheet.

A cruel demise

Maybe if we realized how brutal it is to fin a shark we might also care a bit more. Tragically, sharks are often dragged while alive onto fishing boats where a knife with a hot blade is used to slice off all of the shark's fins. Then, the shark is thrown back into the ocean still alive to bleed to death – or drown.

Fear-driven apathy

And once people know the fate facing sharks, many throw up their hands and wonder why they should care, already convinced the only good shark is a dead shark after watching movies like Jaws. Hasn't the media taught us that sharks are blood-thirsty, indiscriminate monsters with an insatiable hunger for human flesh? Should we really care if they disappear? Wouldn't the world just be a better place without sharks?

If only we realized that sharks keep our largest and most important ecosystem healthy – an ecosystem that provides us with much of the air we breathe and food we eat – we might realize our existence, in part, is dependent on theirs. Sharks have sat atop the oceans' food chain, keeping our seas healthy and balanced for 450 million years. Without them, the oceans could topple. For more information, read "**The Importance of Sharks**" factsheet.

Warning: contains poison

Maybe if we knew that while we collectively enjoy our shark steaks, shark fin soup, or shark cartilage, that instead of being healthy we are actually poisoning ourselves, we might stop endlessly creating demand. Because sharks have levels of methyl-mercury in their flesh that is so high, a single shark steak can cause mercury poisoning, leading to sterility, nervous system



issues and birth defects for those that consume it. For more information, read “**Shark Products**” fact sheet.

And, many assume that because they don't eat shark fin soup, they can't possibly be contributing to the demise of the sharks. And while shark fin soup does account for a considerable amount of shark consumption, there are many other culprits. It isn't just something that can be blamed on a single culture or country. And, it isn't just about the sharks. Rays (their family members) are included. Most likely, the health food store, pet store, beauty salon, grocery store and/or local restaurant in your town are selling shark or ray products. Certain energy drinks, pet supplements, vitamins, lotions, dog chew toys, vaccines and even lipsticks - to name but a few - are all known to contain them. And other things you chose to buy, eat and do may impact sharks as well.

That's why we all need to become Fin Free. To build our awareness, increase our knowledge on the issue, and ultimately, end the demand for shark.