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# ENDING THE IMPORTATION OF SHARK FINS INTO CANADA

PRESENTATION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS



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World's Oceans

## **INTRODUCTION**

Good evening Honourable Senators, thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak to you. My name is Kim Elmslie and I am the Campaign Director for Oceana Canada. Oceana Canada was established in 2015 as an independent charity and is part of the largest international group focused solely on ocean conservation. We believe that by restoring Canada's oceans, we can strengthen our coastal communities, reap greater economic and nutritional benefits, and secure our future food supply.

## **UNKNOWN OCEANS**

I want to begin by talking about our oceans. I have a favourite quote by British science fiction writer and explorer Arthur C. Clarke "how inappropriate to call this planet "Earth," when it is clearly "Ocean." The oceans represent approximately seventy percent of the Earth's surface and are home to astounding riches which remain mostly a hidden mystery. Currently only five percent of the world's oceans have been explored. We have better maps of the surface of the moon than we do the bottom of the ocean. At this point in history twelve people have walked on the moon but only three have descended into the deepest part of the ocean, the Marianas Trench, which is approximately eleven kilometres below the surface of the ocean.

The oceans, which support all life on earth, are under tremendous pressure. This includes stress from the impacts of climate change, pollution and unsustainable fishing. Globally, the current rate of fishing is so unsustainable that it is estimated that eighty-five percent of our fisheries are depleted or recovering from depletion. If fishing continues at this rate there could be no more fish left to eat by 2048. In Canada most of our commercial stocks are depleted. Since 1970, an estimated 52 percent of their biomass has disappeared; half of this incredible resource that has sustained so many for so long, gone in one lifetime. But it doesn't have to be this way. Fisheries can be rebuilt and they can be restored to abundance.

## **WHY SHARKS MATTER**

That brings me to sharks. Sharks are not able to rebuild fisheries, only we can do that. However, sharks are vital to maintaining healthy ocean ecosystems.

Sharks are dynamic creatures. The largest sharks are the iconic and charismatic whale sharks which can grow up to 15 metres long, the smallest are spined pygmy sharks which are only six inches long. We are still learning about the sharks that swim in our oceans, in fact, last year a new species of lantern shark was discovered in the waters around Hawaii.

Many of the large shark species are top apex predators and impact ecosystems in significant ways. They prey on weak or sick species, removing them from the ecosystem. More importantly, by preying on species such as rays, marine mammals and even smaller species of sharks they control the populations that are preying on commercially important species including smaller fish, shellfish and crustaceans.

Researchers have even found that some shark species promote the health of coral reefs through preying on invasive species and adding nutrients (via their waste) to the reef system. Some scientists believe that the rapid decline of sharks we are witnessing now could result in the rearrangement of entire marine ecosystems.

### **IMPACT OF SHARK FINNING ON POPULATIONS**

Sharks have been swimming in balance in our oceans for 420 million years, which is 200 million years before dinosaurs walked the earth. They have survived the first five mass extinctions. But they are no match for humans. Sharks are one of the most exploited species on the planet. One hundred million sharks are killed every year. That's approximately 11,000 every hour. It's an astounding number.

One of the greatest threats to sharks is the shark finning trade. It is a brutal and wasteful practice where the fins are cut off of a shark and its body is discarded at sea, where it is left to drown, bleed to death, or be eaten alive by other fish. As many as seventy-three million sharks are killed exclusively for their fins.

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. Although the act of shark finning is illegal in Canadian waters, shark fins continue to be imported into Canada. In fact, Canada is the largest importer of shark fins outside of Asia and our demand is growing. According to Statistics Canada, over 170,000 kilograms of shark fins were imported in 2017. This is more than a sixty percent increase over the volume imported five years ago in 2012. Many of these fins are from vulnerable species.

As the committee has already heard, last year CTV and the University of Guelph conducted DNA testing on shark fins being sold in Vancouver to determine what species they were. The investigation found fins from endangered scalloped and great hammerhead sharks, vulnerable longfin and shortfin mako sharks, blue sharks and thresher sharks among others. Of the fifty-nine shark fin samples collected an astounding seventy-six percent were from shark species on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) list. It is important to note that a species that is designated as a vulnerable species is likely to become endangered unless the threats against it are addressed.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In closing I have two recommendations for the committee. The purpose of Bill S-238 is to ban the importation of fins that are not attached to a carcass. My first recommendation is to strengthen the bill by amending it to include a ban on the importation of processed shark fin.

My second recommendation is to pass Bill S-238. The department of Fisheries and Oceans has banned the finning of sharks in Canadian waters since 1994 through licensing conditions and in March of this year Canada will implement a mandatory fins attached

management measure for all sharks. Passing Bill S-238 provides legislative backing to the existing measures and regulations. It also provides a safeguard preventing fins from vulnerable species from entering our markets, and ensures that Canada is not supporting the global shark finning trade but rather protecting sharks around the world.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.