WHAT IS SHARK FINNING?

Shark fisheries and trade are not constrained by national borders. Their management is therefore lacking; such information is vital for assessing shark populations and understanding and managing differences in fin cutting techniques and variability among shark species.

Implementation of the EU Shark Finning Regulation is severely hampered by the ignorance that allows the transhipment and separate landings of fins and carcasses.

Fins instead of filling vessel storage result in a strong economic incentive to cut off the fins and discard the parts of most sharks, which are a delicacy in Chinese cuisine. Shark meat is less valuable than fins, and differences in fin cutting techniques and variability among shark species defeat efforts to prevent finning.

Fishermen do it because, during the remainder of the carcass at sea, fins are processed and finning is the removal and retention of shark fins at sea.

WHAT IS SHARK FINNING?

Species-specific statistics from EU shark fisheries, landings, markets and trade are severely lacking; such information is vital for assessing shark populations and understanding and managing their populations. This study was supported by the Lenfest Ocean Program. The Program was established in 2004 by the Lenfest Foundation to bring the best scientific research to bear on identifying the causes, consequences and solutions to problems facing the global marine environment. The Lenfest Ocean Program Research Series is a summary of a detailed report prepared by the expert group at and following the October 2006 meeting. The detailed report and a full list of workshop attendees are published at www.lenfestocean.org and www.eulasmo.org

Shark fisheries and trade are not constrained by national borders. Their management is therefore a global issue, requiring action and coordination by managers at several jurisdictional levels.

High fishing pressure coupled with the inherent vulnerability of most shark species results in a need for effective shark conservation measures (European Elasmobranch Association).

Species-specific statistics from EU shark fisheries, landings, markets and trade are seriously lacking, such information is vital for assessing shark populations and understanding and managing fisheries effectively.

Additional benefits of a “fins attached” policy include:

– Land-based processing of carcasses can include careful and precise fin cutting, increasing the value of the finished product.

– Enforcement burden is reduced because fins and carcasses do not need to be weighed separately.

– Calculation, decisions and alterations regarding ratios for different species or fisheries are made onshore.

– Implementation of the EU Shark Finning Regulation is seriously hampered by the ignorance that allows the transhipment and separate landings of fins and carcasses.

– “High-grading” (mixing carcasses and fins from different animals) is impossible.

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1 Regulation EC 1185/2003.

* Opinions expressed herein are of the authors only and do not imply endorsement by any agency associated with the authors.
EUROPE’S SHARK FISHERIES

EUROPEAN FISHERIES have traditionally explored many small but interesting coastal stocks and have been more interested in their exploitation of deep-water sharks. These species and fisheries are relatively well understood. In contrast, the largest European shark fisheries, undertaken on the high seas by pelagic longline boats, France and Portugal are the target of very little research as the data on the species are very poorly documented. Though these fisheries historically targeted primary targets and overall, longline catches of coastal sharks are a large part of the total catch of target species, and most longlines now also target sharks. Additionally, the Atlantic shark stocks explored by European fleets are also heavily fished by Japanese and Taiwanese vessels that operate in the Atlantic as well as in the Indo-Pacific Ocean.

A lack of data on shark catches, use and discards has hampered stock assessments and the introduction of management. There is evidence, however, that many large scorable sharks are being fished extensively and that the populations of the most biologically valuable species and those stocks of critically depleted species and (likely another one-third of the body). Is used in shark fin soup, as well as small fins not kept in other fisheries. They also former retain the entire tail of each shark, instead of just the high value lower caudal lobe cutting practice.

Studies of shark finning have been conducted and gains, but have been made in recent decades as international demand for shark fins has risen. Shark fins, now among the most expensive marine products in the world (up to $500/kg), are reported to be sold and bought for their processing and preparation of shark fin soup. The European Union is the world’s largest exporter of shark fin to China, the biggest consumer market. Shark fins are small and expensive. Notable as a smaller percentage of the reported world landings have been traped since (1982-84) particularly Spain and Italy) were reported to FAO. Since most shark product traders are not recorded, it is difficult to estimate the relationship between trade and shark status, and the total volume of shark finning globally. Data on the number of shark fins landed per vessel, are very significantly underestimated. The number of sharks that must be caught globally to produce the known amount of international trade in sharks varies from 20 to 33 million sharks per year. In the vast majority of cases, the primary fins (light shading) are retained by all fleets. Some European fleets also retain the secondary fins (light shading).

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO ENFORCE A SHARK FINNING BAN?

What is the best way to enforce a shark finning ban? There are three main ways to enforce a shark finning ban. The first and most simple is to require that shark carcasses (whether gutted and discarded on board or not) be landed with their fins still attached and further processing in a manner that does not allow for the removal of their fins. This method is used in many fisheries, including Japan’s and Taiwan’s multinational Pacific longline fleets. The second option is to require that the fins be detached be counted and not exceed a maximum number per carcass (but this would vary by species and fishery). The third option is to require that the fins be detached be counted and not exceed a maximum number per carcass. The third option is the most widely used and supported around the world, including in Europe, although fins and carcasses can be landed separately under this protocol. In the US, vessels supply a small list of vessel-specific conversion factors. Conversion factors may, however, require that these estimates reflect true practices while still maintaining that finning does not occur.

WHAT IS THE SHARK FIN CONVERSION FACTOR?

A lack of data on the number of sharks that are landed with their fins still attached and further processing in a manner that does not allow for the removal of their fins. This method is used in many fisheries, including Japan’s and Taiwan’s multinational Pacific longline fleets. The second option is to require that the fins be detached be counted and not exceed a maximum number per carcass (but this would vary by species and fishery). The third option is to require that the fins be detached be counted and not exceed a maximum number per carcass. The third option is the most widely used and supported around the world, including in Europe, although fins and carcasses can be landed separately under this protocol. In the US, vessels supply a small list of vessel-specific conversion factors. Conversion factors may, however, require that these estimates reflect true practices while still maintaining that finning does not occur.

WHERE THE PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH to fisheries dictates that fisheries management should not wait until we have all the answers, fisheries scientists need good information on shark biology and the products traded. When sharks are processed before they are brought to the dock, verifying that all fins have a body to match, in an attempt to ensure that finning does not take place. Difficulties arise when conversion factors vary between fisheries, often because of different processing practices and the measurement of finning ratios. Discrepancies arise from keeping different methods of estimation and species, and the results vary. Sometimes these are set on the high end of calculated ratios and may fail to protect the desired fin of their target species. This approach can result in releasing shark catch management measures from behind the scenes. If these ratios are, therefore, used to be revised regularly in response to complaints, as has already been the case in the EU and in regional fisheries bodies (e.g. ICCAT). These ratios may, therefore, need to be revised regularly in response to complaints, as has already been the case in the EU and in regional fisheries bodies (e.g. ICCAT). These cycles of changing market demand or as an fisher discovers new ways to get around the management measures in force. What is the best way to enforce a shark finning ban? There are three main ways to enforce a shark finning ban. The first and most simple is to require that shark carcasses (whether gutted and discarded on board or not) be landed with their fins still attached and further processing in a manner that does not allow for the removal of their fins. This method is used in many fisheries, including Japan’s and Taiwan’s multinational Pacific longline fleets. The second option is to require that the fins be detached be counted and not exceed a maximum number per carcass (but this would vary by species and fishery). The third option is to require that the fins be detached be counted and not exceed a maximum number per carcass. The third option is the most widely used and supported around the world, including in Europe, although fins and carcasses can be landed separately under this protocol. In the US, vessels supply a small list of vessel-specific conversion factors. Conversion factors may, however, require that these estimates reflect true practices while still maintaining that finning does not occur.

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The experts identified many drivers associated with using a fin:carcass weight ratio to enforce a shark finning ban that they could not recommend the approach. They concluded that an effective and practical shark finning regulation would have to mandate the landing of sharks with their fins attached and recommended this management policy in the context of ensuring the fin:carcass weight ratio.

The group recommended that the EU Member States act in the context of ensuring the fin:carcass weight ratio. They concluded that there is a need for evaluations that will inform the introduction of a fin:carcass weight ratio. The recommendations are intended for use by Member States to develop policy in response to complaints, as well as in discussions of shark finning and its management with other countries as part of the implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and other international agreements.

ACCURATE FINNING AND TRADE DATA ARE NEEDED FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

WHAT IS THE SHARK FIN CONVERSION FACTOR?

Most finning regulations mandate a simple conversion factor between the weight of shark fins and the weight of the rest of the body brought to the dock, noting that different species have different ratios. There are basically three ways to approach this problem. The first is to determine how many sharks have been landed by using a known number of shark products (such as meat, liver oil or fins) to determine how many animals were taken. They do this using a ‘conversion factor’ for how much shark product is equivalent to the original live shark. The second is to determine the relationship between the volume of shark products traded and the populations of sharks actually taken (by fisheries). The third is to measure how quantities of shark products relative to the number of sharks caught. Conversion factors are also important for the regulation of fisheries. They are used to establish limits on exploitation and fishing quotas and are widely used to implement bans on shark finning.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO ENFORCE A FINNING BAN?

There are three major ways to enforce a shark finning ban. The first and most simple is to require that shark carcasses (whether gendered and discarded on board or not) be landed with their fins attached and further processing in a way that is not consistent with the principles of responsible shark fishing practices in many fleets, including Japan’s and Taiwan’s nearshore Pacific longline fleets. The second option is to require that the fin(s) be detached once caught and before a predetermined maximum number per carcass (but this would vary by species and habitat). The third approach involves mandating that sharks be landed with their fins attached and in a way that is not consistent with the principles of responsible shark fishing practices in many fleets. The problem with these attempts stems from the fact that weight ratios can vary between species and habitats. It is more complicated to use different ratios for different shark species or fisheries, so a single ratio is not realistic or practical. Often, there are no on the high-end of calculated ratios and may not produce the smallest fin, a standard shark finning, various ratios can occur to ensure that sharks are landed with their heads and tails intact. As the time. The second option often calls for a high-weight threshold to ensure that they can keep all the desired fins of their target species. This approach can result in challenges, especially as the catch varies by species and habitat. This is because many of these approaches are undermined by the lack of robust data on which to base their ratios, generally, therefore, should be revised regularly in response to new evidence about how many sharks are caught and the populations of sharks involved. It also means that less data can be used to estimate the relationship between the fin:carcass ratios obtained by Spanish researchers and the conversion factor for this product and for other uses, such as meat, liver oil or fins. This requires more data on how many sharks have been taken out of the sea in order to make sound management decisions. Different shark species are likely to have different ratios, especially as they are caught and processed differently when removing the fins so that more or less shark meat is left attached. For example, the fin:carcass ratios for key shark species in Italy and Canadian Atlantic fisheries are around 2.5 for the weight of one shark, 0.5 for the weight of the head, and 0.3 to 0.4 for the weight of the carcass. In addition, the main reason for the discrepancy between the fin:carcass ratios obtained by Spanish researchers and the conversion factor for this product and for other uses, such as meat, liver oil or fins. 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The experts identified in many drilldowns connected with using a fin:carcass weight ratio to enforce a shark finning ban found that they could not recommend the approach. They concluded that an effective and practical shark finning regulation would have to mandate the landing of sharks with their fins attached and recommended this management policy in place of the current fin:carcass weight ratio. The group recommended EU Member States act in the effective and practical shark fisheries.

Shark fisheries have often been undervalued and ignored, but have boomed in recent decades as international demand has risen for shark products. Shark fins, now among the most expensive seafood

INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN SHARK PRODUCTS

The problem with the last approach stems from the fact that raw weight ratios can vary between species and fisheries. It is not easy to calculate different ratios for different shark species or fisheries. A single ratio is not realistic or practical. Almost all decisions are on the high end of estimated ratios. and not the processed products. There are no limits on the sharks used. Some European fleets also retain the secondary fins (light shading) are retained by all fleets. Some European fleets also retain the caudal fin. The caudal fin is cut off the body at any point

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO ENFORCE A FINNING BAN?

Summary of Recommendations

The main reason for the discrepancy between the fin:carcass ratios obtained by Spanish and Portuguese fleets is that the two countries count shark fins differently. Portuguese and Spanish fleets fish the same blue shark population, but report ratios that are three times larger (over 6% and 15% respectively). Differences arise when converter finfishes vary between fisheries, because of different measuring practices and conversion factors. Discrepancies arise from keeping different numbers of fins from each carcass and/or cutting different elements of the tail. For example, the fin:carcass ratio for blue shark fins in Scotland and Canadian Atlantic fisheries is about 2% of fin to whole weight or 5% of fin to dressed (headed and gutted) carcass weight. Portuguese and Spanish fleets find the same live shark populations, but report ratios that are three times larger (over 6% and 15% respectively).

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Finning is the removal and retention of shark fins and the discarding of the remainder of the carcass at sea. This can be resolved by requiring sharks to be landed with their fins attached. This would not be too burdensome for the industry, because many onshore processing facilities already deal with whole sharks, and any port that can handle shark carcasses cannot be characterized as inadequate for fisheries effectively.

While shark and ray flesh is a delicacy in Chinese cuisine, shark meat is less attractive and value of all fisheries products.

Demand for and value of shark meat have increased less rapidly, while stocks of valuable species have been overfished. This has created a strong economic incentive to cut off the valuable fins and discard the remainder of the highly nutritious carcass at sea. This practice has been called ‘finning’.

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Finning is the removal and retention of shark fins and the discarding of the remainder of the carcass at sea. This can be resolved by requiring sharks to be landed with their fins attached. This would not be too burdensome for the industry, because many onshore processing facilities already deal with whole sharks, and any port that can handle shark carcasses cannot be characterized as inadequate for fisheries effectively.

While shark and ray flesh is a delicacy in Chinese cuisine, shark meat is less attractive and value of all fisheries products.

Demand for and value of shark meat have increased less rapidly, while stocks of valuable species have been overfished. This has created a strong economic incentive to cut off the valuable fins and discard the remainder of the highly nutritious carcass at sea. This practice has been called ‘finning’.

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CONCLUSIONS

After thorough deliberation, the expert workshop reached the following conclusions:

- There is insufficient data to determine whether the current EU Shark Finning Regulation is effectively prohibiting shark finning.
- Implementation of the EU Shark Finning Regulation is seriously hampered by the recognition that allows the transportation and separate landing of fins and carcasses.
- A bycatch ratio is a complicated and exactly immeasurable method for preventing finning because of differences in cutting techniques and variability among shark species. For size and values, these criteria localizes to its.
- Setting ratios at the upper end of (or above) scientifically derived rates, as is often the case, exacerbates this problem and leads to precise with small sizes, which are much more at particular risk of finning.
- Lack of information and inconsistency in fin-removal practices prevent scientific determination of a single optimal to fish ratios.
- Given the uncertainty and complexity of the situation, the current EU Shark Finning Regulation cannot be characterized as effective.
- Consequently, to ensure finning cannot take place, sharks should be landed with their fins attached. This would not be too burdensome for the industry because many current processing facilities already deal with whole sharks, and any port that can handle shark carcasses can handle shark fins.
- Additional benefits of a “fins attached” policy include:
  - Calculation, decisions and alterations regarding ratios for different species or fisheries are unnecessary.
  - Enforcement burden is reduced because fins and carcasses do not need to be weighed separately.
  - Quality of the information on species and quantities of sharks landed (information important for fisheries management) is vastly improved.
  - “High-grading” (mixing carcasses and fins from different animals) is impossible.
  - Land-based processing of carcasses can isolate useful and precise fin cutting, increasing the value of the finished product.
- Shark fisheries and trade are not constrained by national borders. Their management is therefore a global issue, requiring action and coordination by managers at several jurisdictional levels.
- High-finance pressure coupled with the inherent vulnerability of most sharks species makes the need for effective shark conservation measures urgent.

- Species-specific statistics from EU shark fisheries, landings, markets and trade are severely lacking, such information is vital for assessing shark populations and understanding and managing fisheries effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The expert group made the following recommendations based on their findings:

The European Commission and Council of Ministers should:
- Amend the EU Shark Finning Regulation to require that sharks be landed with their fins still attached. Stiff penalties could be introduced and/or enforced.
- Promote more effective Shark Finning Regulations through the Regional Fisheries Bodies (negotiating international access to which the EU is a Party).

Individually, EU Member States should take the following step-gate actions to prevent shark finning in the region:
- Jointly to the EU, the need to process sharks as is (as required) or discarding issuing the necessary permits that allow fishermen to remove shark fins at sea.
- Immediately suspend that relaxes requiring sharks for under existing special fishing permits must land shark fins and carcasses at the same time, in the same port.
- Immediately pre-enforcement of the EU Shark Finning Regulations, as described above.

The European Commission, Member States, Regional States and Fisheries Bodies should:
- Mandate full conversion to shark finning through independent, on-board observers.
- Increase investment in shark data collection at landing sites and by processing and marketing industries.
- Establish role maximizing and management resources for target and bycatch shark fisheries within their realm, including mandatory catch limits when data are lacking.
- Cooperate in the exchange of information and the harmonisation of management measures across national boundaries.
- Ensure that both trade and distribution of shark fins, meat, and oil are recorded separately by commodity (not to its species level where possible).

The October 2006 expert workshop was attended by a group of international experts in shark research, trade, conservation and management drawn from ten countries. This Lenfest Ocean Program Research Series report is a summary of the expert workshop’s findings and a call to action: overfishing is an issue of global concern and requires urgent action.

The study was supported by the Lenfest Ocean Program. The Program was established in 2003 by the Lenfest Foundation and managed by the Lenfest Institute. For more information about the Program, please visit www.lenfestinstitute.org or contact us at info@lenfest.org.

About the Authors


European洋洋 is the world’s leaders in fishing for sharks. The most valuable parts of most sharks are their fins, which are a delicacy in Chinese cuisine. Shark meat is less profitable, which results in a strong economic incentive to cut off the fins and discard the carcasses back into the sea, a practice called “shark finning.” The Council of the European Union prohibited shark finning in 2003, but in 2006 the European Parliament questioned whether the regulations in place are effective at preventing this practice.

An expert workshop on shark finning tissue in Europe, convened by the Lenfest Institute and funded by the Lenfest Ocean Program, was held in Brussels in October 2006. Participants described and compared data on shark biology, fisheries, markets, and trade (compiled in this full report), as well as the management framework regarding regulations, science-based management methods to prevent the practice of shark finning. This Lenfest Ocean Program Research Series report is a summary of the expert workshop’s findings.

WHAT IS SHARK FINNING?

Fishing is the removal of representative samples of shark and the discard of the remainder of the carcass at sea. Fishermen do it because, during the past two or three decades, shark fins have become one of the most valuable of all fisheries products. Demand for and value of shark meat have increased less rapidly, however, and thus the value of all fisheries products has become one of the most valuable of all fisheries products. 

Finning is the removal and retention of shark fins and the discard of the shark carcass at sea. Fishermen do it because, during the past two or three decades, shark fins have become one of the most valuable of all fisheries products. Demand for and value of shark meat have increased less rapidly, however, and thus the value of all fisheries products has become one of the most valuable of all fisheries products. 

EUROPEAN FLEETS are among the world’s leaders in fishing for sharks. The most valuable parts of most sharks are their fins, which are a delicacy in Chinese cuisine. Shark meat is less profitable, which results in a strong economic incentive to cut off the fins and discard the carcasses back into the sea, a practice called “shark finning.” The Council of the European Union prohibited shark finning in 2003, but in 2006 the European Parliament questioned whether the regulations in place are effective at preventing this practice.

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CONCLUSIONS OF AN EXPERT WORKSHOP ON EUROPEAN SHARK FINNING BAN OPTIONS FOR ENFORCING THE SHARK FINNING BAN STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN FISHERIES MANAGEMENT: