

Over fishing of sharks causes rapid decline in top predators

- **Why sharks are important**

- They keep fish populations healthy.
- They keep other predator populations from getting too large.



- **Decline of shark populations**

- 58% of pelagic shark species are considered threatened or near threatened
- Mexico and California shark catches per unit effort have decreased 25% since 1980

- **Removal of shark fins at sea (“finning”) is the leading cause of decline.**

- Shark fins sell for around \$40 per fin or \$330 per pound (shark fin soup).



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- **Laws:**

- Current U.S. laws ban any finning; with the exemption of dogfish sharks, of which you can have up to 12% of total catch weight in fins.
- Only 15 out of 125 shark-fishing nations have implemented shark fishery management plans that include banning or regulating finning.
- California legislation ((AB376) 2011) -
 - Complete ban of selling of fins
 - Stronger than federal law.
 - Good model to follow.

- **Weaknesses with federal laws:**

- Hard to determine type of shark from fins alone.

- Legislation is based on weight for dogfish sharks so fishermen can have up to 3 times as many fins as sharks making it possible to have fin sets from more endangered species.
 - Difficult to determine where the shark was caught.
 - Limited species-specific and size-specific catch and discard data
- **Problems with current data**
 - Current catch records are poor quality and quantity.
 - Sharks are highly migratory and cross state and national boundaries.
 - Recreational anglers are not required to report their catches.
 - Many shark species have not been assessed.
- **Possible actions:**
 - Complete ban of removal of fins at sea
 - Development of international science program to address the major informational needs concerning sharks.
 - Placement of observers on fishing boats to get better high seas data.
 - NOAA's observer program has been very successful.
 - Standardized log books.
 - Lower incidental catch (“bycatch”) of sharks through improved gear and practices.



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