

FACT SHEET:

Sharks / Chedeng

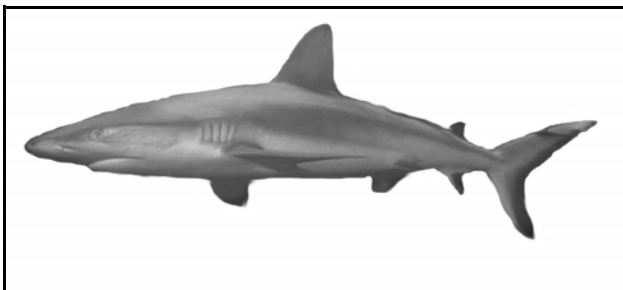
Sharks are ancient and magnificent dwellers of the ocean. The first ancestors of sharks occupied the oceans of the earth over 350 million years ago. Today, sharks are heavily exploited by commercial longline fisheries for nothing more than their fins. Due to the rise of the demand of shark fins by Asian markets, sharks, the bold rulers of the blue seas, are becoming alarmingly scarce.

The Ocean's Top Predators

Sharks are at the very top of the marine food chain. They are responsible for keeping fish species in check by eliminating the sick and the weak. With sharks around, populations of fish are guaranteed to be healthy and fit. Sharks play a key role in stabilizing marine ecological systems. Sharks prevent population explosions of various fish and invertebrate species, which would thus dominate food supplies and cause other species to die out. Without sharks, fishermen's catches would certainly suffer.

Reproductive Strategy

Unlike other fishes, sharks are slow to grow and late to mature. Sharks may take between 12 to 15 years before they can reach sexual maturity. Many sharks carry their young internally and bear only several young pups at one time. The young receive no parental care once born and must fend for themselves against hungry predators. Populations of



Exploiting Sharks

Currently, sharks face an uncertain future. Commercial longline fisheries target sharks for their fins, which fetch high prices in Asian markets. Shark fin soup, thought to have medicinal properties in certain Asian cultures, can sell for up to \$100 for just one bowl. While fishermen can earn a profitable income from shark fins, the fins alone make up less than 5% of the shark's actual body weight. The rest of the carcass is simply thrown overboard. The practice of shark finning, an unsustainable and wasteful practice, is not against the law in Palau.

The Need to Preserve Sharks

Why must we protect sharks? Sharks are important for reasons beyond the fact that they are top predators in the marine ecosystem. In Palau, sharks are an important piece of revenue for the Republic's tourism industry. A live shark at Blue Corner can rake tens of thousands of dollars each year into Palau's economy. Sharks are one of the biggest underwater attractions offered to divers in Palau. In addition, the unique physiology of sharks may be important in medical research for finding cures for cancer and other life-threatening diseases.

How can you help?

Write to your Senator or Delegate in support of the need to ban shark finning in Palau's waters.

