

Survey in China Highlights Public Support for Shark Conservation and Lack of Knowledge About Impacts of Consumption

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Beijing: 24 May, 2007: WildAid and the SSIC today launched the findings of a survey in to shark consumption habits and attitudes.



The survey report revealed that Chinese consumers have very little understanding of the negative environmental impacts associated with shark losses, while indicating mounting public support for effective shark conservation activities.

The survey, carried out between November 2005 to February 2006, produced unique in-depth information on the status of shark fin consumption, and identified public attitudes toward shark conservation in China.

The survey report also notes that the demand for shark fin soup is at an all time high. As affluence has grown in Asia and in China in particular, then so has the market for luxury goods like shark fin, highlighting a recent study estimating that the fins from between 26 and 73 million sharks are traded globally each year, while reported world trade in fins has nearly tripled from 4,900 metric tons in 1987 to 13,600 mt in 2004.

The survey used Focus Group Discussions comprising shark fin consumers, providers and journalists, conducted in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou to obtain high calibre qualitative data on attitudes.

Key findings were:

- Public have little knowledge of the following: how shark fins are produced, their low nutritional value, the declining numbers of sharks worldwide, negative environmental impacts associated with shark losses, and the potentially damaging health effects of eating shark fin;
- Shark fin providers are not willing to reduce their business given its current economic benefits without the imposition of official restrictions;
- The Chinese media has done little to publicise shark conservation, and the potential negative impacts resulting from eating shark's fins;
- There is positive public attitude towards shark conservation activities and consumers would be likely to be willing to participate in shark conservation activities if there was more public awareness and information about the concerns for conservation and environment from over-consumption available to them.

Mr. Steve Trent, President of WildAid said that "recent research has proven that many shark species and populations have experienced precipitous declines over the past 20 years, some by as much as 99%. Science also tells us that shark species are highly vulnerable to over-exploitation. Now we are witness to an explosion in the consumption of shark fin soup in China and as demand for the soup has risen so has the targetting of sharks just for their fins, wasting up to 99% of the animal. Yet, this survey shows two key things: first that consumers are largely unaware of where shark fin comes from, of over-fishing, illegal shark fishing or finning and secondly, that there is strong support for much better shark conservation and management. WildAid believes that action is needed now to ensure better management and conservation if shark populations and species are not to be made extinct. China, we believe can take a highly responsible, global lead in this."

To prevent shark populations from plummeting worldwide, driven by the increasing demand for fins, WildAid and SSIC make the following recommendations: take effective measures to reduce the consumption of shark's fins; direct and regulate the shark fin trade; carry out promotional and educational activities for the protection of sharks; put an end to the indiscriminate capture of sharks; reasonably utilize marine resources, and keep marine ecological balance.