

11th December, 2019

His Excellency Prayut Chan-o-cha
The Secretariat of the Prime Minister,
Government House,
1 Nakhon Pathom Road
Dusit, Bangkok, 10300.

Subject: Open letter requesting state banquets to no longer serve shark fin

Dear Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha,

This letter is respectfully submitted by an NGO coalition that includes WildAid, Seub Nakhasathien Foundation, Greenpeace Thailand, Nature Play and Learn Club, Shark Guardian, Love Wildlife Foundation, Bird Conservation Society of Thailand, Manta Trust (Thailand) and Freeland Foundation. We respectfully call for your urgent attention and action on ending consumption of shark fin at any state events.

On 3rd December 2019, a government-sponsored dinner was held for government coalition members where shark fin soup was served. Shark fin consumption not only is pushing shark species to the brink of extinction, but destroys marine biodiversity in the process.

Sponsored consumption of shark fin by the Thai government is directly contributing to the endangerment of shark species, and the marine environment – in Asia and beyond. More specifically, a comprehensive scientific study conducted by a consortium of scientists discovered that at least 76 species of sharks are commonly found in the trade in Hong Kong, of which almost one third are listed as under threat of extinction on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

In 2013 the State Council of the People's Republic of China banned shark fin soup at official banquets nationwide. That year, the Hong Kong government also followed suit with a complete ban on the consumption of shark fin by all government officials and civil servants. It is clear that setting 'No Shark Fin' policies is the direction that society is moving towards.

Thailand has much to gain from taking pro-active steps to protect sharks with substantial benefits to coastal fisheries, biodiversity and tourism. Scuba diving in Thai waters remains a leading tourist attraction, and healthy shark populations and marine ecosystems can further enhance Thailand's appeal to tourists wishing to experience pristine coral reefs and rich marine life.

We respectfully seek your support in protecting sharks and the ocean by adopting a policy prohibiting shark fin at state banquets and government functions. Together we can help establish new social norms where shark fin is considered unacceptable and is taken completely off the menu. Please see the reasons for our requests outlined below:

- Around 100 million sharks are unsustainably slaughtered each year, with fins from around 73 million sharks ending up in shark fin soup.¹ The practice of shark finning is not only unsustainable, it is cruel and inhumane. Sharks have their fins hacked off whilst still alive and are then thrown back into the sea, alive, where they bleed to death, get eaten by other fish, or drown (if they are not in constant movement their gills can no longer extract oxygen from water).
- Sharks are facing the largest crisis of their 420-million-year history: tens of millions of sharks are fished and traded globally each year – Davidson *et al.* 2015²

¹ Worm, Boris & Davis, Brendal & Kettermer, Lisa & Ward-Paige, Christine A. & Chapman, Demian & Heithaus, Michael R. & Kessel, Steven T. & Gruber, Samuel H., 2013. "Global catches, exploitation rates, and rebuilding options for sharks," Marine Policy, Elsevier, vol. 40(C), pages 194-204.

² Davidson LNK, Krawchuk MA, & Dulvy NK. 2015. Why have global shark and ray landings declined: improved management or overfishing? *Fish and Fisheries*: 21

- One in four shark species are threatened with extinction, mainly due to overfishing – Dulvy *et al.* 2014³
- Due to the fact that sharks take years to reach maturity and naturally reproduce slowly, it takes a long time for populations to recover from heavy fishing pressure. Scientific studies show that all around the world in areas where sharks have been removed there has been a correlating crash in fish stocks and a degradation of the local reefs because sharks are keystone species, and critical to maintaining the health of the ocean, which we all rely on for the air that we breathe, sustenance, and the environment as we know it.
- Sharks function as the immune system of the ocean, like white blood cells they combat diseases by feeding on dead, weak, or sick animals, strengthening the gene pool by keeping lower trophic level populations healthy and in balance.
- Illegal shark fishing is practiced at a much larger scale than sustainable shark fishing – Pramod *et al.* 2008⁴.
- A lot of shark finning occurs in remote ports dispersed across thousands of islands or in the open seas – Chen & Phipps, 2002⁵. This undermines monitoring and enforcement efforts, and facilitates illegal fishing and laundering. It is impossible for a restaurant/consumer to tell if the shark species in their soup was caught sustainably or not, and if it is legal or not (CITES regulations, amongst others, ban international trade in several species).
- There exist few-to-no cost-efficient, reliable, widely adopted methods that allow for selective, exclusive fishing of certain shark species, only. As a result, incidental shark capture is a common occurrence, and bycatches include the twelve CITES-listed shark species.
- Species-specific trade monitoring is difficult, since shark fin products cannot be reliably identified morphologically – Clarke *et al.* 2006⁶. There is no way of knowing what species is in your soup without costly genetic testing.
- In addition to being grossly unsustainable, shark meat and shark fin soup are also a potential health hazard because they frequently contain toxins. Due to the fact that sharks are often at the top of the food chain, as apex predators they tend to bioaccumulate heavy metals and toxins such as mercury, methylmercury, cadmium and arsenic, long-term exposure to which can cause cancer, skin lesions, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Beta-Methylamino-L-alanine (BMAA) has also been found in shark fin and muscle tissue samples, suggesting consumers are at risk of developing neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).⁷

The general public are increasingly aware of the threats facing sharks. The United Nations has called for shark conservation measures, and some shark species have been identified as endangered species and given special protections by several

³ Dulvy NK, Fowler SL, Musick JA, Cavanagh RD, Kyne PM, Harrison LR, Carlson JK, Davidson LN, Fordham SV, Francis MP & Pollock CM. (2014). Extinction risk and conservation of the world's sharks and rays. *Elife*, 3, p.e00590.

⁴ Pramod G, Pitcher TJ, Pearce J & Agnew D. (2008) Sources of information supporting estimates of unreported fishery catches (IUU) for 59 countries and the high seas. *Fisheries Centre Research Report*, 16, 242.

⁵ Chen VY & Phipps MJ. (2002) Management and Trade of Whale Sharks in Taiwan. *A TRAFFIC East Asia Report*. www.traffic.org.eproxy2.lib.hku.hk/species-reports/traffic_species_fish9.pdf [accessed 1 December 2017]

⁶ Clarke SC, Magnussen JE, Abercrombie DL, McAllister MK & Shivji MS. (2006). Identification of Shark Species Composition and Proportion in the Hong Kong Shark Fin Market Based on Molecular Genetics and Trade Records. *Conservation Biology*, 20(1), 201-211.

⁷ "Study Finds Shark Fins & Meat Contain High Levels of Neurotoxins Linked to Alzheimer's Disease." Press release. University of Miami. August 29, 2016. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/08/160829163529.htm>



international conservation treaties, including the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES).

In 2013, China banned serving shark fin at government banquets and overall consumption has since dropped by about 80%. Hong Kong also passed a ban prohibiting shark fin from government functions in 2013. In 2019, Canada passed a law that bans the import and export of shark fins, becoming the first country to impose a national ban. In the United States, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, California, Nevada, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maryland, Delaware, Texas, Illinois and three territories (American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam) have all banned the sale, possession and trade in shark fins, and Florida has prohibited the harvesting of three species of hammerhead and tiger shark because of their vulnerability. Some countries, such as Bahamas, Brunei, and Palau, have gone further than just finning regulations and have passed laws banning commercial fishing of all shark species. As for the private sector, Thai Airways and 45 other airlines have banned transport of all shark fin and at-least 186 venues inclusive of hotels and restaurants have been declared fin-free.

In light of the above, as well as the very real threat of extinction threat facing sharks, **we respectfully urge The Royal Thai Government to be a part of the solution to this global challenge and show strong environmental stewardship by no longer serving shark fin at state banquets and celebratory events. Join us as a leading example of how celebrations can be held without fins.**

We stand ready to offer our help with this and to submit more detailed information should you require it.

With respect,

WildAid
Seub Nakhasathien Foundation
Greenpeace Thailand
Nature Play and Learn Club
Shark Guardian
Love Wildlife Foundation
Bird Conservation Society of Thailand
Manta Trust (Thailand)
Freeland Foundation