

Sharks and rays massively under pressure

Around 100 million¹ sharks are killed each year- through by-catch and targeted fishing. Sharks as well as many species of rays are long-lived animals, they grow slowly and reproduce only after several years. This makes them very vulnerable to overfishing. However, 6-8% of the world's shark and ray population is caught each year, leading to the decline of many populations.² Manta rays, for example, are considered endangered, partly because they are hunted for their gill plates, which are used in particular by Chinese medicine.

Finning: agony for a soup

Sharks are hunted specifically for their fins for the shark fin soup- a process called finning, in which the fins are cut off the animals alive and the animals are then thrown back overboard, where they perish miserably. Shark fin soup is not only made from shark fins, but also from the fins of sharklike rays such as the sawfish. Finning is banned in certain regions, such as the EU, but in many places there is still no regulation in this respect.

Mislabeled products

Sharks are also hunted for their meat, the oil from their liver and their cartilage skeleton. However, shark meat is sometimes deliberately mislabelled.³ Recent studies in the Mediterranean show that in Italy, for example, in 40% of the fish steaks tested, shark is sold as swordfish.⁴ In Greece, 56% of fish market samples tested positive for shark, but were sold under a completely different name.⁵ Some of the shark species are protected and their catch is illegal. Apart from undermining any efforts to protect them, this fraud also raises questions about food safety: The meat of certain shark species⁶ is heavily contaminated with mercury, sometimes many times the legal limit.⁷

Sharks and rays have lived in the oceans since time beyond memory. If we don't act, they will become extinct.

That's why we must avoid products containing sharks and rays. This includes obvious offers like shark fin soup and shark steaks, but also mislabeled fish products, cosmetics, food supplements or animal feed!

¹ Range: 63 - 273 million

² <https://www.npr.org/2014/01/22/264579513/ancient-and-vulnerable-25-percent-of-sharks-and-rays-risk-extinction>

³ <https://www.visiondive.com/falsche-namen-fuer-hai-fleisch/>

⁴ De Pinto et al., 2015

⁵ Pazartzi et al., 2019

⁶ The meat of swordfish is also heavily contaminated with mercury and the species is completely overfished in certain regions, such as the Mediterranean.

Sources: <https://www.fda.gov/food/metals/mercury-levels-commercial-fish-and-shellfish-1990-2012> and <http://firms.fao.org/firms/resource/10025/en>

⁷ WWF 2019