

# GIANT US TRADE DEAL MIGHT WEAKEN SHARK FIN BAN

By Matt McGrath Environment correspondent, BBC News

Environmental campaigners are "extremely concerned" that a new trade deal involving the US could weaken attempts to end shark finning. The first steps to outlaw the practice were agreed at a meeting in Bangkok last March. But the leaked draft text of the new deal involving 12 Pacific countries has no binding commitment to curb finning. The long-running negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement [were] due to conclude in April, [but are ongoing]. The TPP is being billed as a critical part of President Obama's strategy of engaging with Asia. He's called it his "top trade priority."

But green groups are disturbed over the direction the negotiations are taking. They are worried that concessions are being made on critical environmental issues in order to secure agreement. Last March, delegates at the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) meeting in Bangkok agreed to enhance protection for a number of species. The belief was that this would lead to a reduction in shark finning. In finning, the fish are left to die after their fins are cut off, to supply a lucrative trade in shark fin soup. It's estimated that **millions of sharks die this way every year.**

## WHAT IS SHARK FINNING?

### ENDANGERED RATE

### WHAT'S HAPPENING?

AN ESTIMATED **32%** OF OPEN OCEAN SHARKS ARE THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

SOME SHARK POPULATIONS HAVE DECREASED BY **99%** OVER THE LAST **50 YEARS**

AN ESTIMATED **100 MILLION SHARKS** ARE KILLED EVERY YEAR

**73 MILLION** OF WHICH ARE FOR SHARK FIN SOUP

### WHAT IS FINNING?

SHARKS ARE CAPTURED AT SEA



HAULED ON DECK

AND ARE OFTEN STILL ALIVE WHEN THEIR FINS ARE SLICED OFF



THE MAIMED ANIMALS ARE USUALLY TOSSED OVERBOARD TO DROWN OR BLEED TO DEATH

UP TO **98%** OF THE ANIMAL IS WASTED, SINCE THE FINS ARE MORE VALUABLE THAN THE REST

### THE BUSINESS OF SHARK FINS

FINS CAN SELL FOR AS MUCH AS

**USD \$880 PER POUND**

MAKING IT ONE OF THE MOST EXPENSIVE SEAFOOD PRODUCTS IN THE WORLD

**\$100**

A BOWL OF SHARK FIN SOUP CAN SELL FOR AS MUCH AS \$100 USD PER BOWL



IN HONG KONG, **89%** OF PEOPLE SURVEYED HAVE EATEN SHARK FIN SOUP AT A WEDDING BANQUET

**145**

COUNTRIES ENGAGE IN THE TRADE OF SHARK PRODUCTS

RUSSIA, SINGAPORE, TAIWAN, INDONESIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED STATES

**50% to 80%** OF FINS COME THROUGH HONG KONG



### THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARKS



SHARKS ARE AT THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN. THEIR DEPLETION CAN DRASTICALLY AFFECT THE ENTIRE MARINE ECOSYSTEM



SHARKS ARE SLOW GROWING, LATE MATURING, LONG-LIVED AND GIVE BIRTH TO FEW YOUNG, MAKING THEM ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO OVERFISHING

**\$2 MILLION DOLLARS** THE TOURISM VALUE EACH INDIVIDUAL REEF SHARK CAN CONTRIBUTE TO A COASTAL COMMUNITY OVER ITS LIFETIME

**\$108 DOLLARS** THE VALUE OF A SHARK KILLED FOR CONSUMPTION

**80 Hg** MERCURY

CONTRARY TO THE MYTH THAT SHARK FINS ARE NUTRITIONAL, SHARK FINS HAVE MERCURY LEVELS UP TO **42X** HIGHER THAN THE SAFE LIMIT

But the leaked draft text of the environmental chapter of the new agreement is "very weak" on this issue according to campaigners. "We've been calling for a ban on shark finning, which should be in this chapter," said Ilana Solomon from the Sierra Club. "All we got in the text was a suggestion that countries should come up with fish management plans that may include, as appropriate, measures to address shark finning."

The Office of the US Trade Representative said that the negotiations were still ongoing, and they would be pushing hard for strong environmental measures, including a ban on shark finning. "A prohibition on shark-finning is one among the many trailblazing proposals that the United States has contributed to the TPP," said a spokesman. "Despite resistance, we are continuing to push for the strongest possible outcome that is fully supported by comprehensive environmental enforcement."

## Toothless agreement

In 2007, President George W Bush reached an agreement with Congress that any future free trade agreements would include a list of environmental treaties that all the signatories would agree to uphold.

But the proposed new deal simply acknowledges that countries have made commitments under agreements like CITES. It does not insist that the commitments be honored.

"If the environment chapter is finalized as written in this leaked document, President Obama's environmental trade record would be worse than George W Bush's," said Michael Brune, also with the Sierra Club.

"This draft chapter falls flat on every single one of our issues - oceans, fish, wildlife, and forest protections - and in fact, rolls back on the progress made in past free trade pacts."

The US negotiators say they are pushing hard for strong environmental protection in the deal. But since the nations they are negotiating with are huge exporters of natural resources including timber and fish, environmentalists are concerned that free trade will mean a free for all in endangered but valuable species.

"This peek behind the curtain reveals the absence of an ambitious 21st Century trade agreement promised by negotiating countries," said Carter Roberts from WWF.

"The lack of fully-enforceable environmental safeguards means negotiators are allowing a unique opportunity to protect wildlife and support legal sustainable trade of renewable resources to slip through their fingers."



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Call, email, write and fax your US Representative and Senators and urge them to oppose any legislation – whether called “Fast Track”, “Smart Track” or anything else, that would expedite the passage of TPP implementing legislation in Congress by preventing members of Congress from amending the legislation to ensure stronger protections for sharks and other wildlife. Strong opposition prevented such a bill from moving in Congress in January 2014, and another version is expected to go to Congress in November or December 2014, after the November election.

Also urge your elected officials to contact President Obama and US Trade Representative Michael Froman and let them know that they will vote against TPP unless it contains strong, enforceable safeguards to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat and does NOT contain investor rights provisions that give corporations the power to sue governments in international tribunals outside the jurisdiction of their national court systems for enforcing their environmental and animal protection laws. You can find their names and contact info at <http://freetradekillsanimals.org/leg>.

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