

# Sharks in Danger

## The President can stop overfishing

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<http://www.tortugamarina.org/downloads/nacionopinion.pdf>

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International fishing fleets that operate in the Eastern Pacific and land their catch in Costa Rica are practicing shark finning, in violation of our national regulations. The recent scandals generated by alleged illegal landing of tons of shark fins during the last months by Taiwanese and Panamanian vessels confirms both the lack of controls and the privileges these international vessels enjoy in practically each and every link of the administrative control system.

Sadly, the prevailing situation fosters over fishing, threatening not only sharks, but the ecological integrity of the ocean itself. The socioeconomic consequences of this are grave, due to the impacts on our fishing and tourism industries, as well as the possible evasion of millions of US\$ in taxes.

**Multiple anomalies.** The first excuse proffered by the various institutions responsible is that they lack the financial and human resources to exercise control. Due to alleged lacking resources only random vessels inspections are held. Nonetheless, the current situation is evidence enough that either incompetence or negligence reigns among the public functionaries responsible to carry out the random inspections. There is no other way so many controls could be evaded. A closer look reveals, however, another series of anomalies, from State regulators working simultaneously for private companies they are paid by the State to control, in an open conflict of interests, to unhindered landing of shark fins at unauthorized private docks where controls are more easily evaded.

What solutions do the authorities offer us in response to officially filed complaints? The Ministry of Public Works and Transportation (MOPT) now mandates that foreign fishing vessels must be inspected at the public dock in Caldera, before proceeding to land at private docks. The National Fishery Institute (INCOPECA) recently announced the implementation of a Cooperative Agreement with the National Union of Biologists, which will provide inspectors when vessels land to ensure compliance with current legislation. Nonetheless, neither plan offers a real solution and thus will be ineffective. MOPT's mandate still allows vessels to continue landing products at private docks. Furthermore, it is impossible to properly inspect a vessel in Caldera, where not even a scale is available to verify the landing bills. The Cooperative Agreement with the National Union of Biologists only proposes biologist inspectors during weekends, at private docks, using a complex system to verify weight proportions between fins and carcasses. Furthermore, INCOPECA expects the owners of the fishing vessels, the same ones who constantly violate the regulations, to voluntarily pay the cost of the biologist inspectors. !

**Rotten system.** What is unmistakably absent is the intention to demand compliance with current legislation: landing of shark products solely at public docks at authorized schedules and the prohibition to land shark fins unattached to the respective shark bodies. The proposals put forth by MOPT and INCOPECA do nothing to solve the eternal problem of lack of funds and personnel, not to mention the incompetence, negligence, or corruption, that rots the system from its foundation.

That's why more than 13,000 Costa Rican citizens, over 50 national environmental NGOs, and over 100 commercial establishments, are asking President Abel Pacheco to acknowledge the state of emergency and act now to save the sharks. He must immediately stop the landing of shark products by international vessels, until a legal framework exists with clear applicable consequences pointed out, together with enough resources and personnel to exert true controls.