

Shark Fins

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Ironically, Costa Rica is said to be one of the few countries that has banned shark finning. However, at the same time Costa Rica is a major exporter of shark fins, 533 tonnes last year, the majority of which went to Asia, according to official figures.

How many sharks died to produce such enormous export numbers? Thousands, when one realizes that the average weight of these animals is 20 kilos and the fins barely represent 5% of the weight, that is, one kilo. A few calculations, and we have an idea of the number of sharks that were killed in order to export those 533 tonnes: 533,000 animals!

That, merely in the waters around Costa Rica. The obvious question then is: how long can our sea tolerate such massive extraction of sharks?

Or, how much have shark populations declined in the region over the last few years?

We can be sure that the decline has been significant. Official data shows that fishing activity has shot up in the last ten years. For example, in 1994, 20 tonnes of shark fins were landed at ports on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. In 1998, that number rose to 217 tonnes, and although more recent official shark fin landing figures are lacking, the exportation figure of 533 tonnes speaks volumes.

Thus, it is time for Congress to finally decide to reform the Fishery Law. Why? Look at the year the law was passed, 1948. Because our Fishery Law is out of date, shark finning, is not a crime. Shark finning is the act of cutting off the fins (that are sold in Asian countries for US\$256 per pound to prepare soups) and discarding the rest of shark, still alive, back into the sea. Massacre.

Costa Rica, which boasts about banning shark finning, has merely one regulation to avoid this practice. One regulation that requires vessel inspections, but if no inspector is available the regulation permits the vessel captain to make a sworn statement that he didn't fin sharks (?).

It is a regulation whose loopholes facilitate the indiscriminate killing of sharks.

Congress has the power to end this multimillion dollar business, now.