



Press release
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**Unprecedented DNA study of Hong Kong's shark fin retail market finds:
At least 76 species sold as shark fins**

A study looking at the species composition of shark fins sold at Hong Kong's dried seafood stores found at least 76 species of sharks, batoids and chimaeras, 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.

This is the first survey conducted in the past decade that looks into the details of the local shark fin retail market. More than 4,800 samples of shark fin trimmings were analyzed by a team of American and Hong Kong-based scientists from Stony Brook University, New York, Florida International University, Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden (KFBG), and others, over 12 months. Species were confirmed using DNA (genetic) analysis. The study is published in the international peer-reviewed journal, *Conservation Biology*.

"The use of DNA analysis methods allows an exact species identification of even dried or cooked shark fin pieces," says Dr. Gunter Fischer, Head of Flora Conservation & Genetic Laboratory at KFBG and a co-author of the study's published paper.

Findings of the study indicate that Hong Kong's shark fin market is far more diverse than past studies have found, including even species that are not strictly sharks (rays, skates, and ratfishes) and pieces that are not fins, but other body parts of sharks. Consumers may not only be unknowingly purchasing and eating these, but also species threatened with extinction, while believing they are eating fins of legally traded sharks.

"The study provides a species list of the contemporary shark fin market which was not previously available to us," says Stan Shea, Marine Program Director of BLOOM Association Hong Kong and also a co-author of the study's published paper. "With this knowledge, we can step up our work in motivating better management of the trade, starting from the port of Hong Kong."

Hong Kong is one of the most important trade hubs for shark fins, with records of shark fin imports from over 130 countries/territories worldwide. Since 2014, over 3 metric tons of illegally traded shark fins have been confiscated at Hong Kong's ports by officials. Confiscated shipments included shark fins from species that require special permits under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), but were smuggled without due documentation.

Increasing regulation and enforcement can be one of the best available solutions that both protect shark species from extinction and ensure the continuity of the dried seafood trade. On this issue, BLOOM Association Hong Kong has recently compiled "Wildlife Trade 2.0: 8 Steps Connecting to the Future", offering eight policy-related suggestions for the consideration of the Hong Kong Legislative Council, and ultimately, the Hong Kong Government. Recommendations include requiring species information to be clearly labelled at stores to inform consumers of what they are purchasing. The document also calls for Legislative Council members to support the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals

and Plants (Amendment) Bill 2017 submitted to the Hong Kong government in June 2017, which includes a penalty increase for illegally traded wildlife products.

“Stopping illegal and unsustainable trade in shark fins requires a comprehensive approach,” says Philip Chou, an officer with The Pew Charitable Trusts’ global shark conservation campaign. “Threatened shark species will survive only if better trade and fisheries management practices are put in place locally and internationally. Additional resources should also be invested to enhance the enforcement of existing regulations.”

Motivating members of the Legislative Council will be a crucial upcoming step in changing Hong Kong’s policies for a better regulated trade.

“Even when SCUBA diving around the world you may never be able to see so many different sharks underwater, and yet here in Hong Kong’s dried seafood street as many as 76 are found,” says Legislative Councilor and dive instructor Elizabeth Quat. “A third of those are even threatened with extinction. Hong Kong can no longer afford to take such a passive approach, and it’s time for us to take up our international responsibility to protect sharks. We hope to start a discussion in this term’s LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs.”

Hui Chi Fung, Legislative Councilor and Central and Western District Councilor comments, “I never thought that so many shark species would appear in Hong Kong. Parts or derivatives of sharks that are threatened with extinction can be seen everywhere. Hong Kong’s citizens have been eating these sharks without even knowing and are encouraging the trade. If you must eat them, at least find out whether or not the species is endangered.”

As for research, re-tailed shark fins and fin trimmings should continue to be monitored so that trends in the trade’s species composition can be assessed.

“The sustainability of the dried seafood trade, and we are not just talking about shark fin, is in the hands of the Hong Kong Government,” says Stan Shea.

If you have any further enquiries, please contact:

Ms. Kathleen Ho
BLOOM Association Hong Kong
kathleenho@bloomassociation.org
+852 9882 1094

Ms. Wing Law
Ogilvy Public Relations, Hong Kong
wing.law@ogilvy.com
+852 2884 8165 / 6752 1992