

# Shark safeguards: Elevating EU controls on shark trade



## Executive summary

Sharks are incredibly important for ocean health as well as local livelihoods through the tourism and small-scale artisanal fisheries they support. Like other predators, sharks play an important role maintaining healthy ocean ecosystems<sup>1</sup>. How and where they feed controls food chains, affecting the numbers and distribution of prey species, which has knock-on effects for various marine habitats. For example, the presence of tiger sharks has been shown to prevent turtles from overgrazing seagrass beds that play an important role as carbon sinks<sup>2</sup>. Large fish like sharks are also effective carbon sinks themselves, so keeping more large fish in our ocean by preventing overfishing helps reduce the carbon dioxide being released into our atmosphere<sup>3</sup>. Through their migrations and diving behaviour, sharks also help cycle nutrients between different locations in the ocean and between deep and shallow water<sup>4</sup>. A 2013 study estimated shark tourism generated more than USD314 million and supported more than 10,000 jobs around the world. In the following two decades the value of shark tourism was expected to generate more than the landed value of global shark fisheries<sup>5</sup>.

Yet, global demand for shark products, primarily fins and meat, together with a lack of catch and trade management, is driving shark populations to extinction. The European Union (EU) plays a significant

role in the global trade as a major catcher and supplier to Asian markets. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) undertook an extensive analysis of official raw customs data of Hong Kong SAR, Singapore and Taiwan province and published the findings in its report [Supply and Demand: The EU's role in the global shark trade](#) on 1 March 2022, demonstrating that the EU is one of the top sources of shark fin products for these Asian markets<sup>6</sup>. It concluded that the EU has a responsibility to ensure that its participation in the global trade is not driving these species further towards extinction.

Crucial developments have taken place since the publication of IFAW's extensive trade analysis. At the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) 19th Conference of the Parties (CoP19), which took place 14-25 November 2022, the EU and other CITES parties supported the inclusion of 97 additional shark and ray species on Appendix II and, together with already listed species, approximately 90% of global fin trade is now under CITES control.

IFAW's 2022 report was based on the analysis of legal data as registered by customs authorities from Hong Kong SAR, Singapore and Taiwan province. This report is based on follow-up research looking at both the legal trade data as reported by

the EU27, covering import into and export by the EU27 to all countries worldwide, and also includes illegal trade data as registered by the Member States in the EU Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange database (EU-TWIX).

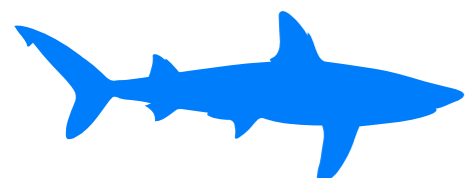
Regarding the legal trade data, the report complements the earlier research by providing: i) fuller details on the total trade between 2017 and 2021 by the EU27, ii) new data on the economic value of all shark imports by the EU and the countries supplying shark products to the EU, and iii) the export value and main destinations where EU Member States are exporting their products. The illegal trade data focuses on seizures of shark products as reported by EU Member States between 2017 and 2020.

Implementation and enforcement are urgently needed to prevent the global demand from driving shark species to a point of no return.

# Visual data overview of EU trade in shark fins and meat

## Legal trade

Study period 2017-2021



## Total import and export of fins and meat

Reporter(s) / Partner(s)

EU27 / All partners	Total import quantity (kg)	Total import value	Total export quantity (kg)	Total export value
Shark fins	1,004,099	€8,085,598	12,761,166	€176,984,297
Shark meat	160,876,807	€366,810,323	156,500,277	€341,318,806
<b>Total</b>	<b>161,880,906</b>	<b>€374,895,921</b>	<b>169,261,443</b>	<b>€518,303,103</b>

Not only the shark fin trade represents a high economic value; the quantity and value of the meat trade is even more substantial for the EU27.

### 2x

The economic value of the (re-)export (including intra-EU trade) of shark meat is almost double the value of the fin export.

## >161 million kg import

of shark fins and meat reported by EU27

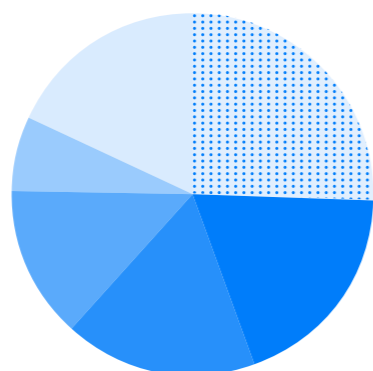
## >169 million kg export

of shark fins and meat reported by EU27

## Top fin suppliers

## >1 million kg import

of fins reported by EU27



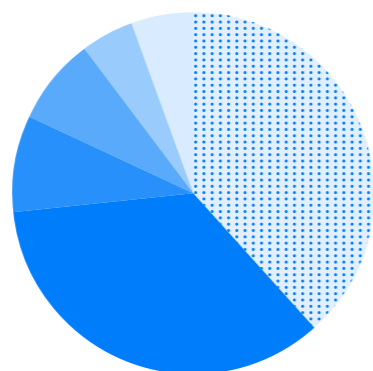
- Spain 25,6% (256,616 kg)
- Portugal 19,1% (191,760 kg)
- Morocco 17,2% (173,139 kg)
- United Kingdom 13,4% (134,629 kg)
- Netherlands 6,7% (67,466 kg)
- Rest 18,0% (180,489 kg)

Top five shark fin import partners (suppliers) by percentage and quantity

## Top fin receivers

## >12 million kg export

of fins reported by EU27



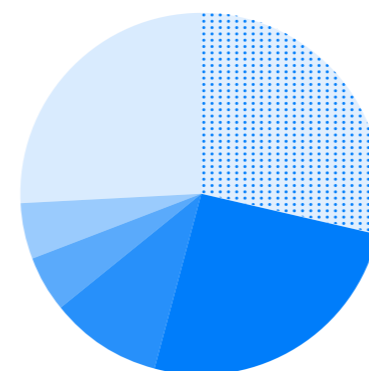
- Singapore 38,6% (4,926,212 kg)
- China 34,8% (4,444,336 kg)
- Spain 8,7% (1,104,421 kg)
- Hong Kong 7,8% (994,115 kg)
- Taiwan 4,6% (591,250 kg)
- Rest 5,5% (700,832kg)

Top five shark fin export partners (receivers) by percentage and quantity

## Top meat suppliers

## >160 million kg import

of meat reported by EU27



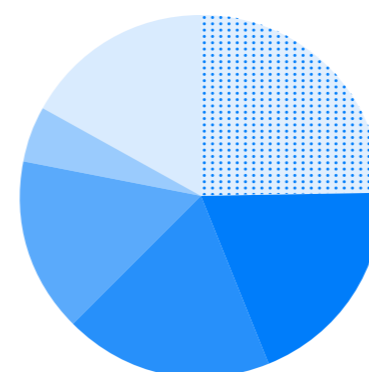
- Spain 28,7% (46,097,392 kg)
- Portugal 25,5% (41,055,420 kg)
- Namibia 10,0% (16,062,793 kg)
- United States 5,2% (8,433,537 kg)
- Japan 4,9% (7,906,568 kg)
- Rest 25,7% (41,321,097 kg)

EU27 top five shark meat import partners (suppliers) by percentage and quantity.

## Top meat receivers

## >156 million kg export

of meat reported by EU27



- Spain 24,9% (39,009,526 kg)
- Portugal 19,0% (29,725,520 kg)
- Italy 18,7% (29,317,180 kg)
- Brazil 15,5% (24,245,833 kg)
- Morocco 5,2% (8,141,784 kg)
- Rest 16,7% (26,060,434 kg)

EU27 top five shark meat export partners (receivers) by percentage and quantity.

## Illegal trade

Study period 2017-2020

### 30

seizures of shark products were reported by only nine EU Member States in four years, of which 14 were registered under the common category 'Sharks' showcasing a lack a proper identification of the affected shark species

### 3

out of the 30 seizures took place at a maritime port despite the vast majority of shark products being transported through shipping

### 1

seizure consisted of shark fins (5.7 kg).

### 7

unregistered seizures - including five containing fins - were detected through a simple media search in different Member States with translated search terms

## EU provides a platform for transit of illegal shark products

4 out of 8 significant seizures are transit shipments, intercepted by an EU Member State which was neither the country of origin nor the destination



Photo: © Shane Gross

## Recommendations

### 1. Prioritise the use of trade data to combat illegal wildlife trade in sharks and shark products

- Consistently record all seizures in the EU-TWIX database and other seizure databases;
- Increase enforcement capacity (focus on maritime ports) and organize product identification trainings;
- Share trade data in cross-national platforms;
- Make intelligence from seizures accessible to trading partners

### 2. Improve the quality of trade monitoring

- Expand the HS codes to differentiate between the status of the traded species and the specific species of traded shark fins, and update the HS codes for meat
- Create a specific HS code for cartilage products;
- Review the HS commodity codes for shark products and standardise code use with key trading partners;
- Encourage collaboration and sharing of trade data between trade officials and enforcement authorities.

### 3. Implementation of CITES shark listings and capacity building

- Organise implementation workshops for authorities to become familiar with listings, to identify shark products accurately, and to build capacity to accurately capture and report trade data;
- Use data from this report as a baseline to evaluate whether new listings result in increased trade data entries;
- Evaluate the significant levels of catch and trade of CITES-listed shark species by EU Member States to ensure these meet CITES sustainability requirements.

International Fund for Animal Welfare

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#### About IFAW

For over a decade, IFAW has been working with governments around the world to support better management for sharks and rays. From the development of shark identification materials for fisheries, customs and enforcement officers, to raising awareness on the conservation needs of shark species, and building the capacity of governments to meet their obligations under international conventions such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). IFAW also provides technical support for governments looking to enact progressive and precautionary management for shark catch limits, or prohibitions when warranted, at a national level.

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Blue sharks.

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#### Endnotes

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