

Meat on the menu and fins for export: Latin America's shark trade with Asia



Executive summary

Global shark conservation has come a long way, with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) 19th Conference of the Parties (CoP19) in November 2022 being a real tipping point; CITES parties supported the inclusion of 97 additional shark species on Appendix II and, together with already listed species, more than 90% of global fin trade is now under CITES control.

Different regions play an active role in the global shark trade; supplying the Asian markets with shark fins, receiving shark meat for domestic consumption or making profit through internationally operating fishing fleets and/or facilitating the transit of shark products for re-export. Prior to CoP19 in 2022, Bloom Association in collaboration with the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) undertook an extensive analysis of official raw customs data of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (referred to as Hong Kong SAR hereafter), Singapore and Taiwan province, China (referred to as Taiwan province hereafter) and published the findings in the report [Supply and Demand: The EU's role in the global shark trade](https://www.ifaw.org/international/resources/eu-role-global-shark-trade), www.ifaw.org/international/resources/eu-role-global-shark-trade, in March 2022, demonstrating that the EU is one of the top sources of shark fin products for these Asian markets¹.

To complement the 2022 trade analysis, IFAW followed up with its 2023 report [Shark safeguards: Elevating EU controls on shark trade](https://www.ifaw.org/resources/eu-safeguards-shark-trade), www.ifaw.org/resources/eu-safeguards-shark-trade, giving more insights into the legal and illegal trade flows by looking at both the legal trade data as reported by the EU, covering import into and export by the EU 27 Member States to all countries worldwide, and also illegal trade data as registered by the Member States². The study illustrated the economic value of the trade and the dominant trade flows by identifying the main suppliers and export destinations.

The current report follows in the series of trade analyses of raw customs data of Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, and Taiwan province from 2003-2020, this time mapping out the role of Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) countries, with the aim of helping governments in the region to understand, monitor and regulate their shark-related trade. Several of the recommendations focus on improving transparency and traceability of the traded products. Given the global scale of the shark-related trade, and the multiplicity of trading partners, countries trading in the products will need to proactively work together to share trade data, standardise trade reporting formats and greatly improve the quality of the trade data collected. Such steps are required to

bring the level of data transparency and traceability to where it needs to be for a trade as complex and potentially detrimental as the shark trade.

The trade analysis series aims to contribute to this much-needed endeavour by mapping out trade flows, highlighting discrepancies, increasing transparency of the global shark trade and making recommendations for this and other regions in order to prevent them from contributing further to the extinction of shark species.

The LAC study shows that the region plays an important role not only in the shark meat trade, but also supplies a significant proportion of shark fin trade to Asia. Given its significance in the trade with Asia, it is recommended that further research into the LAC region's shark-related trade with other key trade players, such as the European Union (EU), is undertaken to find out the extent of the LAC region's role (both in volume and in its diversity of trade partners) in the global trade.

Visual overview: Latin America and Caribbean region's shark trade with Asia*

Shark fin trade**

Study period 2003-2020



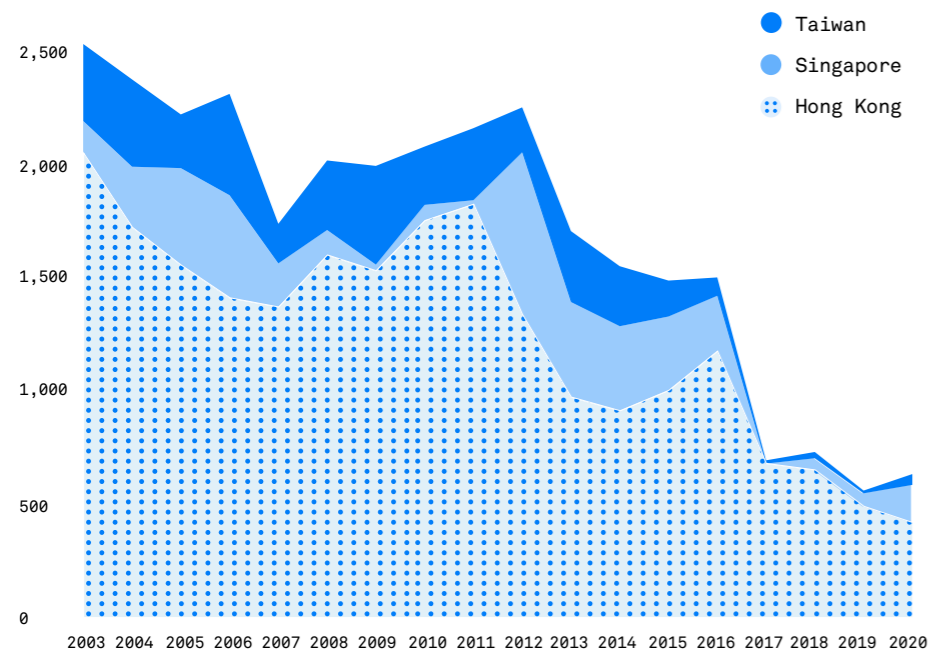
188,369 mt

of shark-fin related products were reported in imports into Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, and Taiwan province combined, with an annual average of 10,465 metric ton³

16%

equivalent to 30,608 mt of the total 188,369 mt of shark fin products imported into Asian trade hubs were sourced from the LAC region

Total shark fin imports



Total shark fin-related imports into Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, and Taiwan province (aggregated) from the LAC region 2003-2020

* Asia in this report refers to the three Asian trade hubs Hong Kong SAR, Singapore and Taiwan province since we only analysed their raw customs data. As a follow-up research, data from major traders like China should also be analysed.

**'shark meat' covers all data from shark meat-related customs codes 'shark fin' covers all data from shark fin-related customs codes

Despite a declining trend in the volume of shark fins traded with Asia, the LAC region remains a significant supplier

Top fin sources

Reported source of imports	Total reported trade (metric tons), 2003-2020
1 Costa Rica	5,613
2 Peru	3,714
3 Uruguay	3,475
4 Mexico	3,429
5 Argentina	2,429
6 Trinidad and Tobago	2,223
7 Brazil	2,067
8 Panama	2,066
9 Ecuador	1,875
10 El Salvador	721
11 Chile	701
12 Guyana	472
13 Suriname	446
14 Guatemala	333
15 Colombia	312
16 Venezuela	253
17 Belize	156
18 Nicaragua	150
19 St Vincent and the Grenadines	99
20 Cuba	23

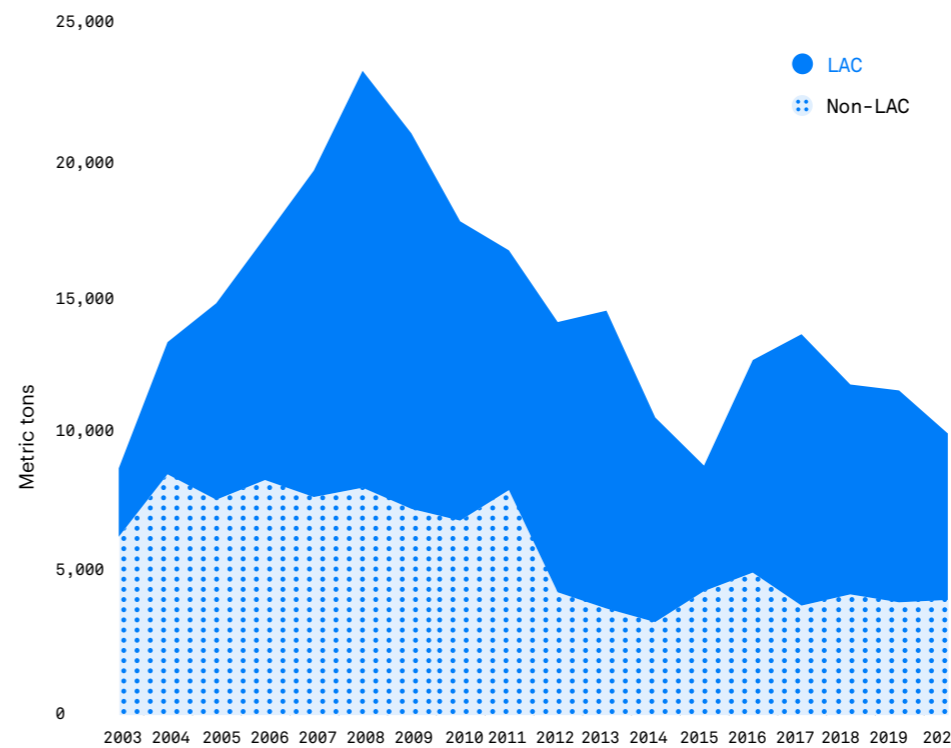
Top 20 reported LAC region sources for total shark fin-related products imported into Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, and Taiwan province, 2003-2020.

Due to its key role as fin supplier and meat consumer, the LAC region has to ensure that its participation in the global trade is not driving shark species towards extinction

Shark meat trade

Study period 2003-2020

Total shark meat exports



Total shark meat-related exports from Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, and Taiwan province (aggregated) 2003-2020. Taiwan was the main exporter of meat to the LAC region, but it is not possible to tell from the trade data if the products were re-exports or domestic exports from local shark fisheries, as Taiwan is also one of the top shark fishing actors.⁴

The LAC region received the majority of all shark meat exports in 2020 and represents the main destination globally for meat exports from Asian trade hubs

267,345 mt

of shark-meat related products were reported in exports from Hong Kong SAR, Singapore and Taiwan province with an annual average of 14,853 metric tons

58%

equivalent to 157,240 mt of the total 267,345 metric tons of shark meat products exported from the Asian trade hubs went to the LAC region. This reiterates previous research which shows South America (and South Korea) to be key consumers of shark meat⁵.

Top meat destinations

Reported export destinations	Total reported trade (metric tons)
1 Uruguay	69,444
2 Brazil	60,361
3 Mexico	25,006
4 Trinidad and Tobago	1,158
5 Guatemala	456

Top five reported LAC region destinations for the total shark meat-related products exported from Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, and Taiwan province.

Bigger discrepancies in data Peru and Ecuador

Hong Kong SAR data recorded far more in imports from Peru (an average of 257 mt from 2015-2020) than Peru reportedly exported (an average of 2 mt). This comparison only considers Hong Kong SAR import data and had not investigated trade data from other destinations. Discrepancies were also noted in comparison to Ecuador's data. This may suggest possible under-reporting in Ecuador and Peru's total exports. Smaller discrepancies were noted in the data of Chile and Colombia. Data from other countries could not be compared due to lack of comparable data and/or no response to our data request.



Recommendations

1. Ensure the effective implementation of CITES Appendix II listings of shark species

- ▶ Increase capacity for detailed trade reporting.
- ▶ Undertake specialised training for customs and border control staff to visually identify products belonging to CITES-listed shark species to deter illegal trade activities.
- ▶ Establish channels for effective communication between government departments of key trading partners regarding suspect shipments.

2. Improve recording of data and trade records via a review of the Harmonized System (HS) commodity codes for shark products and standardise code use with key trading partners

- ▶ Initiate collaborations with key trading partners to review HS codes used and reach consensus on updating codes, to provide more detailed information on products traded and increase traceability by using compatible codes and include species-specific information for at least CITES-listed species.

3. Build domestic capacity for long-term trade monitoring through trade data analysis and research

- ▶ Make a comprehensive dataset available, to make comparisons of the customs data against the CITES trade database and FAO's FishStatJ database, to identify potential inconsistencies in reporting format or product values and quantities.

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

- ▶ Share trade data in cross-national platforms to enable the better coordination of intelligence, at least with relevant key trading partners.
- ▶ Establish a mechanism to exchange information regarding successful seizures (excluding sensitive personal and/or intelligence data) conducted by governments and accessible for trading partners.

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 of the conservation needs of shark species and building the capacity of governments to meet their obligations under international conventions such as the Convention on the 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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Cover photo: Silky shark in Queen's Gardens, Cuba.

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United Kingdom
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Zambia
Zimbabwe

Abbreviations

CITES - Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMS - Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
EU - European Union
FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HS - Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System, commonly referred to as the Harmonized System
LAC - Latin America and Caribbean region covering the main continent of South America, Central America, and the scattered islands in the Caribbean Sea which includes the West Indies including the Great and Lesser Antilles, and the Lucayan Archipelago. For the full list of countries and territories included, see Annex 1 of the full report.
mt - metric tons

Endnotes

- 1 Shea S, Slee, B., O'Toole, M. (2022). *Supply and Demand: The EU's role in the global shark trade*. Stichting IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare), The Hague, The Netherlands. 36pp. <https://www.ifaw.org/resources/eu-role-global-shark-trade>
- 2 Slee, B., Collis, M. (2023) *Shark safeguards: Elevating EU controls on shark trade*. Stichting IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare), The Hague, The Netherlands. 52pp. <https://www.ifaw.org/resources/eu-safeguards-shark-trade>
- 3 In this summary report, trade data collected from Hong Kong SAR, Singapore and Taiwan province are combined to provide an "aggregated" dataset. It should also be noted that trade data from Hong Kong SAR are separated into "country of origin (CO)" and "country of consignment (CC)". In the following sections unless otherwise specified, CO data is used for import data, while CC data is used for export/re-export data. The distinction is not made for Singapore or Taiwan province's data
- 4 Fischer, J., Erikstein, K., D'Offay, B., Guggisberg, S. & Barone, M. (2012). *Review of the Implementation of the International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Circular No. 1076. Rome, FAO. 120 pp.
- 5 Niedermüller, S., Ainsworth, G., de Juan, S., Garcia, R., Ospina-Alvarez, A., Pita, P. & Villasante, S. (2021) *The Shark and Ray Meat Network: A Deep dive into a global affair 2021* WWF MMI, Rome, Italy Retrieved from the World Wide Web: https://wwf.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/a4_shark_2021_low.pdf on 4th November 2021.