

Like many animals before them, sharks have become prey to human indulgence. Today, sharks are among the ocean's most threatened species.

Similar to killing elephants for their valuable tusks, sharks are now often hunted for a very specific part of their bodies – their fins.

Fetching up to 500 Euros a kilo when dried, shark fins are rich pickings for fishermen. Most shark fins end up in Asia where shark fin soup is a traditional delicacy and status symbol.

With shark fins fetching such a high price, and with the rest of the shark being so much less valuable, many fishermen have taken to 'finning' the sharks they catch to save room on their boats for the bodies of more commercially important fish.

The Shark Alliance is a global, not-for-profit coalition of non-governmental organizations dedicated to restoring and conserving shark populations by improving shark conservation policies.



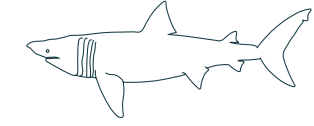
[www.sharkalliance.org](http://www.sharkalliance.org)

# Closing the loopholes on shark finning

## Threatened European sharks



**PORBEAGLE SHARK** (*Lamna nasus*)  
**Critically Endangered off Europe**



**BASKING SHARK** ▲ (*Cetorhinus maximus*)  
**Vulnerable globally**



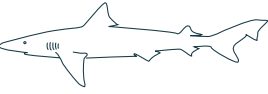
**COMMON THRESHER SHARK** ▲▲  
(*Alopias vulpinus*)  
**Vulnerable globally**



**SMOOTH HAMMERHEAD** ▲ (*Sphyrna zygaena*)  
**Endangered globally**



**SPINY DOGFISH** ▲▲ (*Squalus acanthias*)  
**Critically Endangered off Europe**



**TOPE SHARK** ▲ (*Galeorhinus galeus*)  
**Vulnerable globally**



**SHORTFIN MAKO** ▲▲ (*Isurus oxyrinchus*)  
**Vulnerable globally**



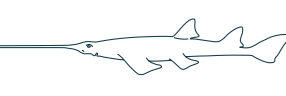
**COMMON GUITARFISH** ▲ (*Rhinobatos rhinobatos*)  
**Proposed endangered in Mediterranean**



**BLUE SHARK** ▲▲ (*Prionace glauca*)  
**Near Threatened globally**



**GREAT WHITE SHARK** (*Carcharodon carcharias*)  
**Vulnerable globally**



**COMMON SAWFISH** ▲ (*Pristis pristis*)  
**Assumed Extinct off Europe**



**ANGEL SHARK** (*Squatina squatina*)  
**Critically Endangered off Europe**

## Globally Threatened sharks on the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Red List

**CR:** Ganges Shark, Pondicherry Shark, Bizant River Shark, New Guinea River Shark, Striped Dogfish, Daggernose Shark, Dumb Gulper Shark, Angelshark

**EN:** Whitetip Tope Shark, Borneo Shark, Speartooth Shark, Narrownose Smoothhound, Argentine Angelshark, Smoothback Angelshark, Sawback Angelshark

**VU:** Tope Shark, Flapnose Houndshark, Sharpfin Houndshark, Smoothtooth Blacktip, Oceanic Whitetip Shark, Sharptooth Lemon Shark, New Caledonia Catshark, Snaggletooth Shark, Southern Sawtail Catshark, Lizard Catshark, Smalleye Hammerhead, Night Shark, Sandtiger Shark, Great White Shark, Basking Shark, Porbeagle Shark, Longfin Mako, Whale Shark, Bluegray Carpetshark, Hooded Carpetshark, Tawny Nurse Shark, Papuan Epaulette Carpetshark, Zebra Shark, Shorttail Nurse Shark, Gulper Shark, Spiny Dogfish, Leafscale Gulper Shark, Angular Angelshark, Eastern Angelshark

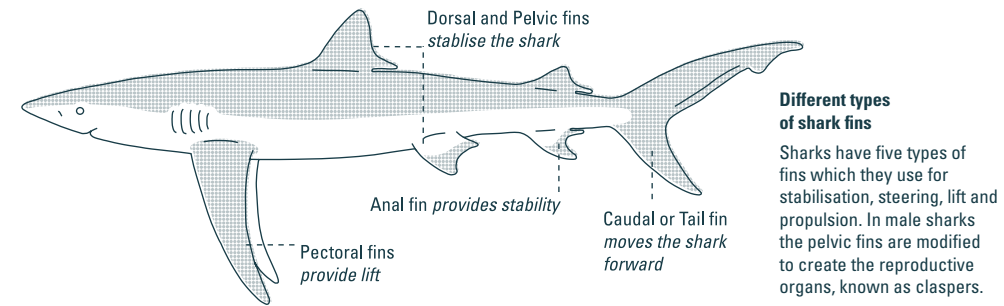
**CR – Critically Endangered**  
Species considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild

**EN – Endangered**  
Species considered to be facing a very high risk of extinction

**VU – Vulnerable**  
Species considered to be facing a high risk of extinction

▲ fins are highly prized  
▲▲ important in fin trade

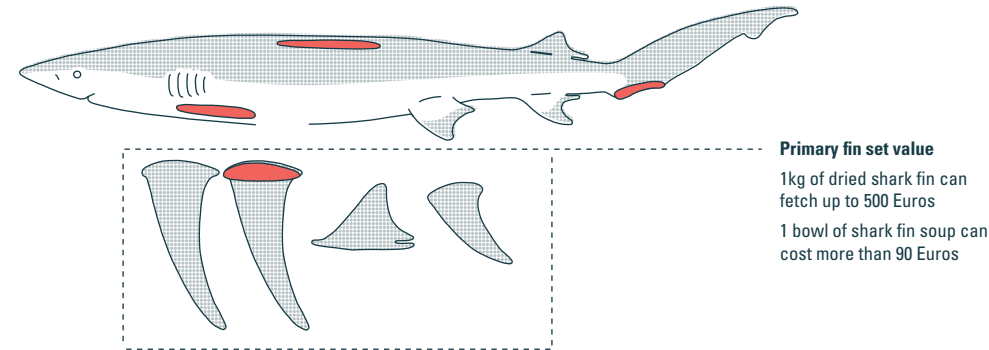
## The facts about finning



### Different types of shark fins

Sharks have five types of fins which they use for stabilisation, steering, lift and propulsion. In male sharks the pelvic fins are modified to create the reproductive organs, known as claspers.

## Market values



### Primary fin set value

1kg of dried shark fin can fetch up to 500 Euros  
1 bowl of shark fin soup can cost more than 90 Euros

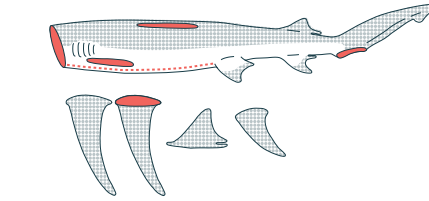
Finning is the wasteful practice of slicing off the valuable fins from the shark and throwing the carcasses back into the ocean. While it is rarely illegal to fish for shark, finning has been banned by many countries around the world and in most international waters.

The European Union (EU) finning regulation is one of the weakest in the world and yet is modelled by other countries and international bodies. Given the EU's influence on global fishing policy and the fact that European fishermen are responsible for roughly a third of the Asian fin trade, the lenient EU finning ban may well be contributing to millions of sharks being killed in this manner each year.

Although the EU finning regulation prohibits the removal of shark fins at sea, a derogation allows EU Member States to provide fishermen with special permits to 'process' sharks, and thereby remove fins, on-board vessels. Germany and the United Kingdom recently stopped issuing these permits. Currently, only Spain and Portugal grant them, but they do so for most of their shark fishermen

## Fin weight ratios

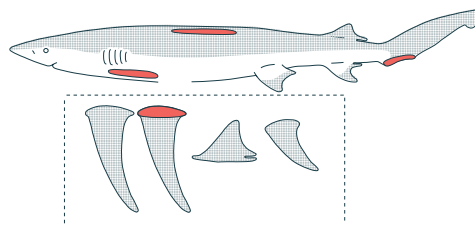
If fins must be removed at sea, or for enforcing finning bans after landing, the IUCN recommends a fin to dressed carcass weight ratio of 5% which equates to about 2% of whole weight.



'Dressed weight' is the weight of the shark after its head and guts have been removed, whereas 'whole weight' is the weight of the shark with head and guts intact and fins attached.

To explain the ratios in physical terms, let's assume a 'whole' shark would weigh 100kg. It would then weigh around 40kg 'dressed'.

A primary fin set of such a shark would weigh up to 2kg and would therefore make up 2% of the whole weight and 5% of the dressed weight.

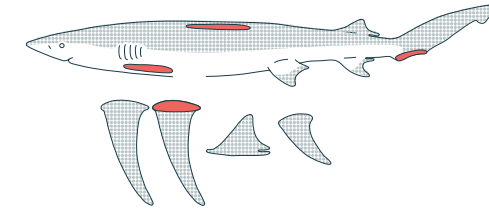


In 2003, in an attempt to prevent finning under these permits, EU fishery managers adopted a maximum fin weight to carcass weight ratio. Such ratios are used around the world to ensure that shark fins and bodies are landed in proper proportions.

The EU ratio of 5% whole weight, however, is higher and more lenient than those of other countries. The EU ratio is set at more than twice the science-based, IUCN standard, resulting in the possibility of up to two out of three sharks caught in European waters, or by European vessels, being finned.

On top of this, it is currently legal for EU boats to land shark fins and carcasses in separate ports. This second loophole further complicates enforcement and undermines an already weak policy.

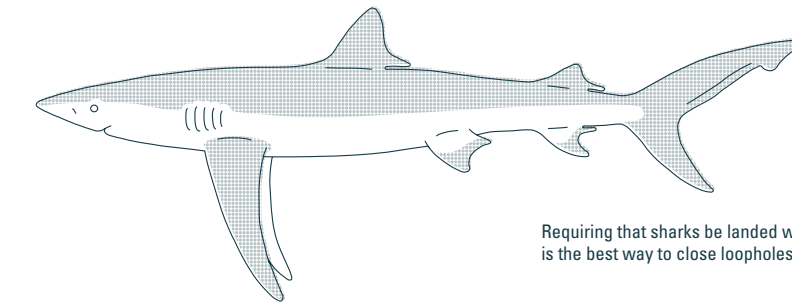
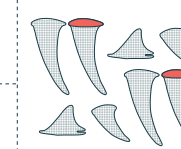
### An example of the loophole in the EU regulation



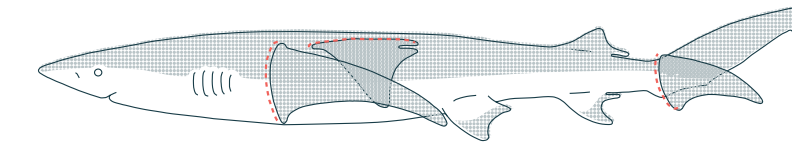
The EU regulation uses a ratio of 5% fin weight to 'whole weight', rather than 'dressed weight'. This ratio would result in a 100kg shark having fins weighing 5kg. This is 2.5 times more than science-based, internationally accepted figures.

### Ramifications of this loophole

Using the same basic figures: as the EU regulation suggests that a 100kg shark has 5kg of fin, if a fisherman catches one 100kg shark whose fins, in reality, weigh up to 2kg, the fisherman can go on catching sharks, finning them and discarding their bodies until he has 5kg of fins to go with the 40kg dressed shark, while still remaining within the law.



Requiring that sharks be landed with their fins attached is the best way to close loopholes and end finning.

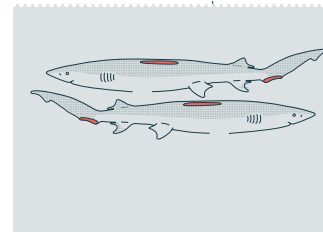


Allowing fins to be cut for folding yet not completely severed is proving to be a solution for fishermen who once argued that storing whole shark carcasses was impractical.

The solution to this problem is quite simple: require fishermen to land sharks with fins still 'naturally' attached so that it can be easily verified that no finning has taken place.

Whereas some European fishermen argue that leaving the fins attached to the body causes storage problems, these same issues have been effectively tackled in other parts of the world where the fins are allowed to be cut, but not completely detached from the body. The 'partial cut' method allows for efficient storage while providing proof of origin for each fin.

Landing sharks with their fins still attached not only effectively halts the practice of finning, it also offers vastly improved information about the quantity and species of sharks being landed. Such information is vital for accurate shark population assessment and effective shark management.



## So what can be done?

The Shark Alliance is urging EU bodies to close loopholes in the EU finning regulation as a matter of priority.

Elimination of the derogation that allows shark fins to be removed at sea is the simplest and most effective means of strengthening the finning ban.

In the meantime, EU Member States can refrain from granting special permits for removing shark fins at sea.

At the very least, the European Commission and EU Member States should ensure that fishermen holding these permits:

- abide by a lower, more precautionary fin to carcass weight ratio not to exceed 5% dressed weight, and
- land shark fins and bodies simultaneously.

Without these changes, the EU regulation will continue to set a bad example and leave these vulnerable predators at risk of further waste and depletion.

The Shark Alliance is committed to the challenge of securing these improvements and welcomes your assistance.