

Taiwan uses DNA mapping to save endangered sharks

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Taiwan has begun testing DNA from shark fins sold in local markets in a bid to protect endangered species such as great whites and whale sharks, an official from the Fisheries Agency said Wednesday.

The efforts come as the island moves to restrict its shark-fin industry, which environmental groups say accounts for the deaths of 73 million [sharks](#) each year across the world.

Taiwanese fishermen are already barred while their vessels are at sea from removing [shark fins](#), which are considered a delicacy in Chinese cuisine and often served in soup at special occasions such as weddings.

Fisheries Agency spokesman Kevin Chung said the department had analysed samples of 100 fin products so far and checked them against DNA databanks of up to three-quarters of the world's approximately 400 [shark species](#).

"Although the tests showed none of the collected samples contained the endangered shark species like [whale sharks](#) and [great white sharks](#), this is another step forward in the Fisheries Agency's efforts to protect them," Chung said.

"Most of the samples belong to blue sharks, which are not banned," he said, adding that the results from a further 100 samples would be available by the end of the year.

A Taiwanese ban on removing fins on board vessels came into effect in January after earlier measures barring fishermen from throwing sharks back into the water after finning failed to quell criticism from animal rights activists.

Campaigners say finning -- the practice of removing shark fins and dumping the rest of the fish in the sea -- condemns the animals to a slow death, threatens endangered species and leads to unsustainable levels of harvesting.

Taiwan has the world's fourth largest shark-fin industry. Despite campaigns from activists, demand for fins is seen as likely to grow as China becomes increasingly prosperous.

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