

EU finally ends shark finning

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Glass containers filled with shark fins are displayed at a store in San Francisco's Chinatown in 2011. The European parliament on Thursday called a definitive halt to shark finning, the long contested practice of fishermen slicing off fins and throwing the live body overboard to drown.

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The EU prohibited shark finning in 2003, but an exemption allowed fishermen with special permits to remove the fins from their carcass out at sea and bring back the remainders or land them in different ports.

In March, fisheries ministers endorsed a proposal to force fishermen to bring sharks to port intact, but the measure needed the approval of the parliament.

Marine [conservation group](#) Oceana applauded the move, saying it marked a key chapter for shark conservation.

"The measure closes long-standing enforcement loopholes in EU policy on shark finning, will improve the collection of valuable data about shark catches, and will help to prevent the trade of fins from threatened [shark species](#)," it said in a statement.

Asia's taste for [shark fin soup](#) is viewed as a key threat to sharks, with marine protection groups saying up to 73 million are killed annually to satisfy demand for the delicacy.

EU nations combined account for the second-largest share, with 14 percent of the world's catches.

Slow to grow and with very few young per birth, sharks are exceptionally vulnerable with several dozen species threatened with extinction.

[Shark finning](#) has also increased due to a strong demand for traditional medical cures in Asia, the ministers added.

"The EU is finally accepting its responsibility as a major global player in shark fisheries and shark fin exports," said Xavier Pastor, who heads Oceana Europe.

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