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EU tightens ban on shark finning



These shark carcasses in Indonesia have had their fins removed

The EU has agreed to tighten up an existing ban on "shark finning" - the practice of slicing off a shark's fins at sea for sale to Asian markets.

The ban for EU fishing crews has existed since 2003, but with special permits they were still allowed to remove the fins from shark carcasses.

Ministers have now agreed with MEPs to eliminate that legal loophole.

The [Shark Trust campaign group says](#) the EU exports 27% of the fins traded in Hong Kong - a major fin-trading centre.

Hong Kong accounts for more than half of all the fins traded worldwide, the group says. They are used in soups and traditional cures in Asia, where they are valued much more highly than the rest of the shark.

Finning is deemed cruel because the fins are often removed while the shark is still alive - it then drowns when it is thrown back into the sea.

A [statement from the EU Council](#), which groups ministers from the 27 member states, said finning had contributed to a serious decline in shark populations.

It said that "with its policy of fins remaining attached, the EU will also be in a better position to push for shark protection at international level".

On a global level Indonesia lands the highest tonnage of sharks.

Conservationists argued that the issuing of Special Fishing Permits (SFPs) that allowed fins to be removed at sea prevented the EU ban from becoming fully effective.

According to European Parliament data, the largest number of SFPs issued were to Spanish and Portuguese vessels (1,266 and 145 respectively, in 2004-2010).

Portugal voted against the new controls, the Council said.