

Straits Times Online Forum

30 January 2012

Fate of humans closely tied to survival of sharks

WE REFER to the reports highlighting FairPrice, Carrefour and Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts stopping the sale of shark's fin products ('Outrage over posting on supplier's webpage', Jan 6; 'Carrefour to stop selling shark's fin too', Jan 7; and 'Shangri-La stops selling shark's fin', Jan 18).

Sharks have existed for more than 400 million years but their population has been decimated in less than 100 years. The main threat to sharks worldwide is over-fishing which is threatening their survival.

We commend FairPrice, Carrefour and Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts on their decision to curtail the threat.

Singapore is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites).

Cites is an international agreement that regulates trade on endangered species based on government votes. While it offers protection for three shark species, it is not the determining body for species classification and population risks.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the organisation that classifies animal risk statuses, not Cites.

As of 2010, 181 shark and related species have been listed on the IUCN Red List - for example, smooth hammerhead and great white are classified as globally vulnerable to extinction. Sharks are at the top of the food chain and they keep the populations of fish and other species in check.

Should sharks become extinct, it will eventually cause fish stocks that are essential to our survival to be depleted.

To cite an instance, over-fishing of sharks off Tasmania, Australia led to an increase in one of their main prey, the octopus, which in turn consumed more spiny lobster. This led to a decline in the spiny lobster fishery and impacted the livelihoods of those dependent on it.

The fate of humans is closely tied to the survival of sharks. We certainly do not want our current or future generations to experience the day when we can no longer benefit from seafood as a source of protein as a result of shark extinction.

Organisations like Cold Storage, FairPrice, Carrefour and Shangri-La are doing the responsible thing and we are glad that they share our view on shark conservation.

We look forward to more organisations following their environmentally responsible footsteps - to stop the sale and consumption of shark's fin until shark populations are once again thriving and harvested sustainably in the wild.

Louis Ng
Executive Director, Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres)
Dr Juliana Chan
Editor-in-Chief, Asian Scientist

Jennifer Lee (Ms)
Founder, Project: FIN

Catherine Teng (Ms)
Volunteer leader, Shark Savers Singapore

Elaine Tan (Ms)
Chief Executive Director, WWF Singapore

http://www.straitstimes.com/STForum/OnlineStory/STIStory_760678.html