



**Chinese New Year  
Hong Kong Restaurant  
Shark Fin Survey  
2016**

## Introduction

The world's shark populations are in crisis. Recent scientific studies continue to paint a grim picture of declining populations against a backdrop of overfishing, in large part driven by the demand for shark fins<sup>1,2</sup> - still reportedly the most expensive luxury seafood product in the world<sup>3</sup>. A recent estimate is that the number of sharks slaughtered annually is conservatively 100 million<sup>4</sup>. Given the biology of sharks and their vulnerability to overfishing (producing few young and late sexual maturity), extinction is on the horizon for many species.

In response to significant consumer demand for shark fins in Hong Kong and the fact the city is the leading importer of shark fins globally, since 2006 there has been a concerted effort by local NGOs to raise the awareness of the importance of sharks to maintaining the health of our oceans. Ultimately the aim is to reduce the demand and supply of shark fin, ostensibly as the conspicuous ingredient of shark fin soup. The results appear encouraging.

Starting with Disney in 2005 and followed by the Peninsula in November 2011, leading five and four star hotels in Hong Kong have progressively banned shark fin soup from banquet menus or serve it only on request (currently over 60% have done so). Similarly, leading institutions such as the Bank of China, have banned it from company banquets and global airlines have banned its carriage, amounting to 31 airlines by mid-2015. According to consecutive surveys,<sup>5</sup> public sentiment appears to be shifting away from the consumption of these beleaguered species and in 2013 the HKSAR Government also took the bold step, requiring that Shark Fin Soup no longer be served at official functions<sup>6</sup>. Such is the mood that there is undeniably a feeling in Hong Kong and even beyond, that we are well on the way to conquering the shark fin problem.

In an attempt to ground truth this and get a snapshot as to whether shark fin is in fact a sunset ingredient of festive dining in 2016, Hong Kong Shark Foundation (HKSF) surveyed local Chinese restaurants in the run up to Chinese New Year, when shark fin soup would traditionally be featured on family reunion dinner menus.

## The survey

Between 10<sup>th</sup> January and 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2016, HKSF surveyed 375 Chinese restaurants<sup>7</sup> located across Hong Kong covering 17 out of Hong Kong's 18 districts, to determine the extent to which shark fin still features as part of Chinese New Year dining in the city. The restaurants surveyed were selected on the basis that they are traditional Chinese restaurants, generally popular over the Chinese New Year period.

From all of these restaurants, a total of 2470 Chinese New Year set menus were reviewed. All were special promotion Chinese New Year set menus, typically provided at family gatherings. Where a restaurant brand had multiple outlets, the restaurant was contacted to determine whether all restaurants within the chain also provided the same menus as those reviewed. For example if restaurant 'A' has five shark fin menus and 10 outlets, it was confirmed whether

---

<sup>1</sup> Worm et al, 2013. Global catches, exploitation rates, and rebuilding options for sharks. *Marine Policy* 40 (2013) 194–204

<sup>2</sup> Dulvey et al, 2014 Extinction risk and conservation of the world's sharks and ray. *eLife* 2014;3:e00590.

<sup>3</sup> Clarke, S, Dent.,F. State of the Global Market for Shark products. FAO

<sup>4</sup> Worm et al, 2013. Global catches, exploitation rates, and rebuilding options for sharks. *Marine Policy* 40 (2013) 194–204

<sup>5</sup> Bloom Association 2015. Survey, on shark consumption habits and attitudes in Hong Kong

Bloom Association 2009. Survey, on shark consumption habits and attitudes in Hong Kong

<sup>6</sup> Government determined to support sustainability-conscious food consumption. HKSAR Government Press release . September 2013 <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201309/13/P201309130572.htm>

<sup>7</sup> A full list of these restaurants and the results are available from HKSF on request

these same menus were available at all 10 outlets. If they were, then this was counted as 50 shark fin menus.

All Chinese New Year menus offered at 183 of the restaurants were reviewed, amounting to 1203 menus in total. For the remaining restaurants in the survey (i.e. of the chains that had other outlets), while all menus common to all outlets were accounted for (bringing the menu total up to 2470), it should be noted that a limited number of menus may additionally be offered by some of the outlets.

## Findings and recommendations

Of the 375 restaurants surveyed, over 98% offered shark fin on their Chinese New Year menus. Only seven restaurants did not have shark fin on any of their Chinese New Year menus:

龍苑中菜廳 Loong Yuen Cantonese Restaurant (Tsim Sha Tsui)  
樂天皇朝 Paradise Dynasty (Causeway Bay)  
莆田 Putien Restaurant (5 outlets)

Of these seven, five (Putien outlets) still provided one dish with shark fin on request. Of the remaining two, one (Paradise Dynasty) did not offer shark fin as it served only Shanghainese fare and the other (Loong Yuen Cantonese Restaurant) did not offer shark fin, reportedly for environmental reasons.

Of the 2470 menus reviewed across the 375 restaurants, just 14.5% were found to be shark free. For the 183 restaurants (where all menus available were surveyed), only 13.8% were shark free. Twenty six of the 183 restaurants indicated an alternative to shark fin is available on request (for a limited number of set menus), but this was not always immediately obvious.

This snapshot suggests that given the predominance of shark fin menus being offered over Chinese New Year in 2016 and the generally limited availability of fin free menus and sustainable alternatives, it is highly probable that a large proportion of Hong Kong's family reunion diners will be feasting on shark fin. Bearing in mind that research<sup>8</sup> has indicated that 40% of the auctioned shark fin trade in Hong Kong is likely made up of threatened species, it is also probable that many diners will in fact be eating shark species that are threatened with extinction.

This outcome appears to be at odds with a recent consumer survey<sup>9</sup> where 93.9% of respondents indicated they were not willing to consume threatened species and where over 90% indicated that it was acceptable not to serve shark fin at a wedding banquet. The conclusion is that despite these assertions, shark fin is likely still being eaten albeit it 'passively' given its still wide availability on popular Chinese New Year set menus.

We therefore urge the Hong Kong public to 'walk the talk' and help conserve sharks by demanding fin-free menus and not consuming shark fin soup over the extended Chinese New Year period as well as beyond.

---

<sup>8</sup> Clarke et al 2006. Identification of Shark Species Composition and Proportion in the Hong Kong Shark Fin Market Based on Molecular Genetics and Trade Records. Conservation Biology Volume 20, No. 1, 201–211

<sup>9</sup> Bloom Association 2015. Survey, on shark consumption habits and attitudes in Hong Kong

	No	%	No	%
Total—Restaurants	375		183	
Restaurants with shark fin menus	368	98.1	180	98.4
Restaurants with no shark fin available (no menus and not served on request)	2	0.53	2	1.1
Restaurants with shark available on request (if not on a menu)	5	1.3	1	0.55
Total—Menus surveyed	2470		1203	
Shark Free Menus available	357	14.5%	166	13.8%

**Table 1: Survey results**