

New Study Finds Half a Million Sharks Are Finned Every Year in Ecuador

by [Jeremy Elton Jacquot](#), Los Angeles on 12.19.08



Image from [Shifting Baselines](#)

Over at [Shifting Baselines](#), Jennifer Jacquet, a PhD student at the University of British Columbia (UBC) Fisheries Centre (who is working with the renowned [Dr. Daniel Pauly](#)), writes about a new study on which she was the lead author, entitled "[Hot Soup: Sharks Captured in Ecuador's Waters](#)" (sub. required). She and her colleagues found that the Ecuadorian government failed to report the catching of around half a million sharks each year.



To get to this number, Jacquet reconstructed Ecuador's shark landings, relying on shark fin export data and other reports, the part of the fish catch that is brought onshore (which often provides the only record of total catch), from 1976 to 2004. She and her co-authors concluded that the country's fisheries were catching more than 3.5 times the number of sharks that the government officially reported—about 7,000 tons per year, or half a million sharks.

The problem, she explains, is that the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) did not require countries to report elasmobranchii (a subclass of cartilaginous fish that includes rays, skates and sharks) in their catch numbers until 2005. Seeing as how the shark finning industry has gotten a deservedly bad rep over the last few years, it's no surprise that Ecuador refused to divulge its shark catch until being forced to do so.

She recommends the following policy prescriptions:

The discrepancies in data require the urgent implementation of the measures Ecuadorian law mandates: eliminating targeted shark captures, finning, and transshipments, as well as adoption of measures to minimize incidental capture. Most of all, a serious shark landings monitoring system and effective chain of custody standards are needed.

Though I've made fun of CNN's "Planet in Peril" series in the past, I have to say that its [season premiere](#), which featured an informative segment on the shark fin industry, was pretty good. Some of the more worrying statistics that Lisa Ling reported, and that Matthew picked up on, include:

- * Humans kill at least 100 million sharks annually
- * The vast majority of caught shark fins are used in soup
- * All recorded shark species, with one exception, have declined by more than 50% in the past 8 to 15 years
- * Shark fins currently sell for about \$500 per pound

Given their reputation for being bloodthirsty "man-eaters" (a total falsehood, of course), it has been difficult to get people to care about their plight. Like all vulnerable species, sharks deserve our protection and, from the look of things, they need it now more than ever.

More about the plight of sharks

[Nigerian Oil, Shark Fin Soup & Elephant Poaching: Planet in Peril's Lisa Ling Answers TreeHugger's Questions](#)