



# coare

The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, & Education

20 October 2011

**via e-mail** (clerk@toronto.ca)

Christopher Chin  
*Executive Director*

Clemente Jiménez  
*Director*

Richard Nelson  
*Director*

Francesca Koe  
*Advisory Board*

Johann Mourier  
*Advisory Board*

Marty Snyderman  
*Advisory Board*

Tim Taylor  
*Advisory Board*

Rex Weyler  
*Advisory Board*

Kate Wing  
*Advisory Board*

Toronto City Council  
c/o Marilyn Toft, Secretariat  
12th floor, West Tower, City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
Toronto ON M5H 2N2  
**CANADA**

Re: LS9.3 By-Law banning shark fins – **SUPPORT**

Dear Mayor Ford and esteemed Councillors:

COARE is extremely concerned with the rapid decline of shark populations, and enthusiastically supports the proposed resolution to adopt a by-law banning the sale and possession of shark fins or shark fin derivative products in the City of Toronto.

Sharks are one of our oceans' top predators, keeping the entire ecosystem in check. They are vital to the health of our oceans, and studies have shown that reduction in one species causes effects on other species, and sometimes these effects are unexpected and detrimental to local and regional economies.

Animals at the top of the food chain, such as sharks, have few natural predators, are slow to mature, and have very few young. Some sharks take up to 25 years to reach sexual maturity, have a long gestation period (upwards of a year), and only have a few offspring in the end. As a result, they are extremely sensitive to fishing pressures, and are slow to recover from overfishing. Many shark species have declined in population by more than 90% in the last 50 years, and some species may have declined by as much as 97-99% in the last 35 years.

Since sharks are caught and finned without regard to species, age, or gender, many sharks are caught before they've reached sexual maturity, and because one-third of pelagic shark species are considered threatened or endangered, it is no surprise that endangered species are represented on store shelves.

Heartbreakingly, even baby sharks are caught and finned in commercial endeavors; one will often find juvenile fins in the Chinatown shops of various cities, and some of those fins will be no larger than the nail on one's pinky finger.

On Thursday, 08 September 2011, we submitted written testimony to the City's Licensing and Standards Committee, highlighting a number of the above points, and on 13 October 2011, I made a special appearance at the Committee's meeting to offer my deputation – and to share our experiences with the process of California's shark fin ban. As you know, the LSC subsequently voted unanimously to support this measure.

As you consider this matter, we would like you to keep in mind the science in the matter, and realize the a few outspoken individuals who are either misinformed or who represent special interests do NOT reflect the majority of Canadian or Chinese-Canadian sentiment.

In addition to the testimony we provided to the LSC, we would like to impress upon you the following additional points as you consider this matter:

**A ban on shark fins will not hurt small businesses.** If anything, it evens the playing field for small business who want to do the right thing. Shark fin soup is most often served in banquet settings and at official celebratory events like a Chinese wedding. Smaller restaurants serve shark fin soup much less often than larger banquet halls do. However, to compete with larger restaurants, small restaurants often feel obliged to offer shark fin soup just in case someone requests it, lest they lose potential customers. Some restaurateurs would prefer, for philosophical or ethical reasons, not to be obligated to offer it, and some would simply prefer to avoid it since it is an expensive ingredient to stock for infrequent use. In either case, we have had proprietors tell us "just make it illegal so we don't have to sell it." This measure helps maintain a level playing field.

**A ban on shark fins will NOT hurt the economy or kill jobs.** For those restaurants that serve it, shark fin soup is only one *seldom* ordered item on a menu with a plethora of other and more common choices. Even at banquets and celebrations where the soup is featured, it is only a single serving among nine or ten courses. End consumers and restaurants alike each purchase their fins from grocery stores, trading companies, and seafood suppliers which sell a myriad of other products; shark fins are far from their sole source of income. Moreover, the fins sold in Toronto markets and shops and the fins served in Toronto restaurants do not come from sharks caught in Ontario (or even Canadian) waters by Ontario or Canadian fishermen; the sharks are captured and finned by vessels all around the world, and their fins are processed elsewhere before import to Canada.

**A ban on shark fins is NOT discriminatory.** As far as the discrimination argument is concerned, common sense reflects the legal definition of discrimination, particularly with regard to law and established practice. Shark fin bans are not discriminatory because they do not affect Chinese or Chinese-Canadians as a class. Such measures merely seek to prohibit the trade and consumption of a luxury product. The fact that more Chinese-Canadians consume shark fin than other ethnicities does not give a delicacy protected status. Moreover, only some Chinese-Canadians consume shark fin, not the average Chinese-Canadian, and certainly not on a regular basis.

We (COARE) find that many Chinese, Chinese-Americans, and Chinese-Canadians in opposition to this legislation simply do not understand the issues. If people knew more about these animals and their crucial role in the ocean, they would want to protect them. As a person of Chinese descent,, I can easily attest to general ignorance about the source of shark fins and the destruction inherent to their gathering.

We know that trade bans work to protect vulnerable species and protect related ecosystems. In recent history, the ivory trade, the bear paw trade, and several other highly sought products were banned to ensure that our environment is sustained now and for future generations.

While Toronto is not an ocean coastal city, its residents still have the power to affect the ocean with their actions and choices. Every single person on this planet both influences and depends upon the health of the ocean. By choosing to move forward with this landmark resolution and the by-law it directs, Toronto will encourage other jurisdictions, and eventually, provinces, to take similar action. In fact, without the approval of the City of Toronto, the primary stakeholder constituency, the province of Ontario would be reluctant to take further action. **It is therefore incumbent upon the municipality to offer leadership in this matter.**

Please join the global movement to put an end to the trade in shark fins by reducing our consumption. Your ordinance would complement similar legislation recently enacted by the State of California as well as legislative bans in place in Washington State, Oregon, the State of Hawai'i, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), as well as your own Ontario neighbors Brantford, Oakville, and Mississauga.

Sincerely,

Christopher Chin  
Executive Director