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Shark Hysteria

The world of the environment is dominated by dramas and driven by hysterias. Inspired by our political and institutional (UN) masters, and guided by our proverbial generosity, we have fallen into the traps set by those interested in anything else but conserving wild species.

In the mid-90s, we were told that if we continue to harvest 100 million sharks every year, soon all species of sharks will have disappeared from the oceans. At the beginning of the Century, an organization called Wild Aid initiated a worldwide campaign against Shark Fin Soup. Numerous tenors of the NGO community including WWF and PEW followed suit. We were entitled to a full range of half-truths, misinformation, and made-for-purpose videos, describing the atrocities imposed on sharks to satisfy the demand for Shark Fin Soup. Literature abounded, explaining that *"harvested shark species have been reduced to 70% or even 90% of their population."*

And the conclusion of this massive misleading campaign was clear: "As a matter of urgency, we need to eliminate the Shark Fin Soup market if we want to save the sharks".

Shark Savors did not have to wait long before reactions came from international institutions, national governments and, of course, from a wide range of non-governmental organizations - NGOs. International and national action plans were developed, sophisticated fund-raising campaigns were initiated from every single NGOs "committed" to saving the oceans. Workshops were held all over the world, demonstrating the imminence of danger and the necessity to react quickly. IUCN Shark Specialist Group and the notorious International Shark Attacks File (ISAF) lead the charge against the Shark Fin Soup, this abject tradition, source of all problems. To enhance the argument, sharks suddenly became gentle creatures that will not dare hurt human beings. According to the leader of ISAF, "you have more chance to be hit by a falling Coca-Cola machine than being attacked by a shark" (sic). No one could resist such a brilliant argument.

Simultaneously, CITES was called upon to the rescue of sharks. A multitude of shark proposals were presented, in most cases, to eliminate the Shark Fin Trade; responsible for the shark onslaught. Despite the warning by some countries that the CITES listing

will not change anything to the status of sharks, unacceptable and unjustified proposals were accepted by CITES.

Of course, Shark Fin Trade was the wrong target. For all purposes, it has disappeared. Nevertheless, we have continued to harvest 100 million sharks a year, as confirmed by recent research published in the Magazine Science.

[Shark kills rise to more than 100 million per year—despite anti finning laws | Science | AAAS](#)

The message in the article is evident as well as scary; the hysteria, blaming Shark Fin Soup for driving sharks' population to extinction, has proven to be a Monster Machination. We have destroyed a culture, we have eliminated livelihoods, we have excluded and disreputed a noble tradition. And for what result? For nothing... absolutely nothing... for the sharks. But NGOs are much better and richer now, so are the international and national agencies which have increased their administrative and financial structures to save the sharks.

The article misses a crucial point. Targeting sharks, for fins, has always been an exceedingly small portion of the harvesting. Shark fins arose mainly and, in certain cases, exclusively of bycatches and subsistence artisanal fisheries.

Interesting questions remain from the article: Is it possible that, after having harvested some 3 billion sharks over the last 3 decades, such harvesting be perfectly sustainable? Is it possible that this harvesting has no detrimental effect on the global shark populations?

My reaction would be to answer yes to these two questions. Otherwise, we could not continuously harvest 100 million sharks every year if it would not be sustainable.

Hopefully, the lessons coming out of this new research will assist us, in the future, to resist the prowess and the manipulation of the Don Quixote of Environment.

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