

# Dining on Threatened Species

A snapshot of endangered seafood offered  
by Hong Kong's leading hotels

Executive Summary

A SPECIAL REPORT BY

**HK SHARK  
FOUNDATION**

香港護鯊會



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## Dining on Threatened Species

### A snapshot of endangered seafood offered by Hong Kong's leading hotels

In 2006, scientists warned that if we carry on with business as usual, global fish stocks could collapse by as early as 2048<sup>1</sup>. In 2010, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) indicated that, at 142 million tonnes annual production, the majority of our fish stocks (more than 80%) were either overexploited or fully exploited<sup>2</sup>. If not addressed, this will have a significant impact on the food security of future generations. In June 2011, the International Programme on the State of the Ocean warned that the world's oceans are at high risk of entering a phase of extinction of marine species unprecedented in human history<sup>3</sup>.

### HONG KONG'S VORACIOUS APPETITE FOR SEAFOOD

Globally, the consumption of seafood is rising rapidly and Hong Kong, with its relatively small population of nearly seven million, appears to have a voracious appetite. Here, per capita consumption is estimated at over 64.4kg/capita, about 3.8 times higher than the global average. Hong Kong's seafood consumption ranks second in all of Asia.

### FISHING TO EXTINCTION

To cope with this increasing global demand, we have industrialised our supply chains and upgraded our fishing technology, ensuring that all kinds of seafood are served year round, worldwide. In achieving this, we have also developed some methods of capturing fish that are illegal, unregulated and destructive to the marine habitat. As a result, pressure on fish stocks is mounting to the point that an increasing number of species are threatened. Indeed

many popular marine species consumed in Hong Kong are known to be at high risk of extinction. This is an outcome that will have untold consequences on the marine ecosystem and will ultimately impact our food supply.

### HONG KONG HOTELS - PURVEYORS OF SEAFOOD

With local living standards rising, Hong Kong residents are seeking better quality food and fine dining. As purveyors of fine food, leading hotels aim to provide such culinary experiences. Since seafood is an integral part of the Canton (Guangdong) cuisine, most local hotels and restaurants have plenty of it on their menus.

Despite local surveys indicating that 66% of respondents were uncomfortable eating threatened species and that 88% indicated the government should prohibit the sale of products that involved killing threatened species<sup>4</sup>, Hong Kong consumers are mostly unaware which marine species are threatened and which establishments provide sustainable seafood.

From July to September 2011, Hong Kong Shark Foundation (HKSF)<sup>5</sup> evaluated a preliminary sample of Hong Kong's leading hotels comprising 44 hotels and encompassing 167 catering outlets. The objective was to determine the extent to which ten threatened marine species (namely Orange Roughy, Monkfish, Humphead Wrasse, Chilean Seabass, Bluefin Tuna, Swordfish, Freshwater Eel, Tropical Prawn/ Shrimp, Camouflage Grouper and Shark) were being offered to the public and whether seafood procurement policies were in place. The survey relied on publicly available information as well as responses to a

questionnaire. It is intended that the findings will:

- i) provide impetus for Hong Kong's hotels to address the continued sale of threatened species, ultimately promoting a more sustainable way to consume seafood and protect our oceans and;
- ii) enable consumers to make informed choices.



Photo by Marco Carè/ Marine Photobank

2 <sup>1</sup> Worm, B., Barbier, E., Beaumont, N., Duffy, J., Folke, C., Halpern, B., Jackson, J., Lotze, H., Micheli, F., Palumbi, S., Sala, E., Selkoe, K., Stachowicz, J. & Watson, R. (2006) Impacts of biodiversity loss on ocean ecosystem services Science: 314 pp. 787 - 790 <sup>2</sup> FAO (2010) THE STATE OF WORLD FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE, 2010 <sup>3</sup> www.stateoftheocean.org/ ipso-2011-workshop-summary.cfm <sup>4</sup> Photo Before the 2011 tsunami critically affected fishing operations, sharks were being landed and finned six days a week at Kesen-numa City, Japan. This photo depicts just one day and one landing of 75 tons.

4 Cultural attitudes to the consumption of shark fin <sup>5</sup> With technical advice provided by BLOOM Association

## OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Highly threatened marine species are commonly being offered in Hong Kong's leading hotel restaurants. The majority of hotels surveyed (80%) listed between three and five species, with 36% offering four species.
- The species most commonly offered (by 93% of hotels surveyed) was found to be shark. Although specific shark species are not identified on menus, a large number are listed as threatened and are almost inevitably being offered in Hong Kong due to both lack protection globally and lack of local regulations on species labeling<sup>6</sup>.
- Sustainable seafood that is clearly defined as such, is largely not being offered in the restaurants' menus.
- Few hotels address the sourcing of sustainable seafood in publicly available policy documents.

### The Peninsula Bans Shark Fin

Since the completion of this survey, on the 21<sup>st</sup> November, the Peninsula, Hong Kong's oldest hotel and one of its most prestigious, announced that from January 1, 2012, it will no longer offer shark fin, thus effecting an outright ban.

Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels, the parent company of the Peninsula, indicated in its press release that the ban would extend across all group operations and therefore includes all Peninsula Hotels, the Repulse Bay Complex and the Peak Complex.

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF THREATENED SPECIES OFFERED BY HOTELS

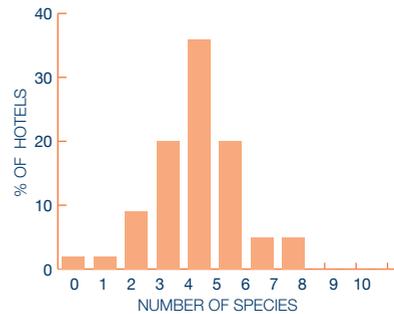
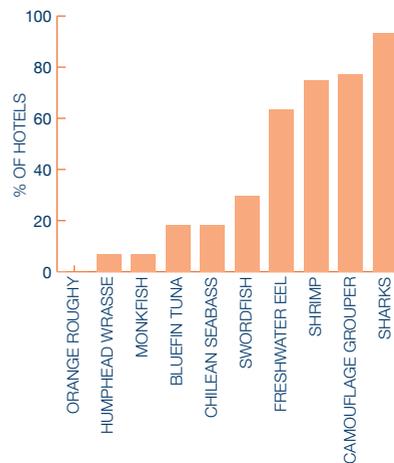


FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF HOTELS & THREATENED SPECIES OFFERED



- There is however an obvious rationale for Hong Kong's leading hotels to extend their sustainability/environmental policy guidelines to cover seafood sourcing:
  - Hong Kong has one of the highest per capita seafood consumption rates in the world
  - Serving threatened species is at odds with the principles of sustainability and should not be excluded from hotels' sustainability policies and practices
  - Hong Kong's top tier hotels are influencers and can lead the hospitality industry on an issue of global importance
- Awareness amongst the hotel community is apparent but has yet to spur widespread action, such as the introduction and enforcement of robust seafood sourcing policies that consider marine sustainability.
- Leading hotels should therefore move the sustainable seafood agenda in Hong Kong forward by not providing seafood species that are imminently in danger of extinction or harvested via unsustainable fishing practices. The hotels should:
  - Develop and implement sustainable seafood sourcing policies and practices and integrate such policies into broader CSR sustainability policies
  - Clearly indicate any species from sustainable sources on restaurant menus to inform patrons and consider introducing seafood guides such as a mobile phone application to facilitate consumer choice
  - Remove threatened species from menus, replacing them with sustainable alternatives
- Promote sustainable seafood menus
- Where shark fin is currently offered, consider:
  - Taking it off menus completely (a weaker position would be to take it off menus but still provide it on request)
  - Actively promote alternatives
  - Introduce and actively promote incentives to have shark free banquets
- Raise awareness and understanding of the issues internally through actively engaging with local NGOs working in the area, and provide staff training, especially for those in F&B.
- Exclude shark fin from all internal functions and explain the reasons to staff.



<sup>6</sup> The following research found that threatened species were commonly traded in Hong Kong: Clarke, S., Magnussen, J., Abercrombie, D., McAllister, M. & Shivji, M. (2006) Identification of shark species composition and proportion in the Hong Kong shark fin market based on molecular genetics and trade records *Conservation Biology*: 20(1) pp. 201 - 211 LOOM (2011) Identification of shark species composition and initial assessment of trace element concentrations in shark fin samples from retail shops in Hong Kong 12pp. (Unpublished)

None of the surveyed hotels received sufficient scores to gain the five star category.

Five hotels were categorised as four star, with the majority of the remainder as three star.

SCORE	SYMBOL
81-100	
61-80	
51-60	
41-50	
21-40	
0-20	-

SCORE	HOTEL	RANKING
81-100		
61-80	JW Marriott	
	Mandarin Oriental (Landmark)	
	Marco Polo Hong Kong Hotel	
	Renaissance Harbour View Hotel	
	Upper House	
51-60	Eaton Smart	
	Four Seasons Hotel	
	Harbour Plaza 8 Degree	
	Hyatt Regency	
	Island Shangri-la	
	Kowloon Shangri-la	
	<b>Peninsula*</b>	
	The Excelsior	
	The Langham Hotel	
	The Ritz-Carlton	
41-50	City Garden	
	Conrad	

SCORE	HOTEL	RANKING
41-50 (continued)	Harbour Plaza	
	Hong Kong Gold Coast Hotel	
	Hong Kong SkyCity Marriott Hotel	
	Hotel Panorama by Rhombus	
	InterContinental Grand Standford	
	Langham Place Hotel	
	Mandarin Oriental	
	Nikko Hotel	
	Regal (Airport)	
	Regal (Kowloon)	
	Regal Oriental	
	Royal Plaza Hotel	
	Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel & Tower	
	The Mira	
	The Royal Pacific	
	The Royal Park Hotel	
	W Hotel	
21-40	Grand Hyatt	
	Harbour Grand (Kowloon)	
	Harbour Plaza Metropolis	
	Inter-Continental Hotel	
	Le Méridien Cyberport	
	Regal (Hong Kong)	
	Regal Riverside	
	The Park Lane	
	Holiday Inn Golden Mile	
0-20	Harbour Grand (Hong Kong)	-

Note: Hotels are listed in alphabetical order within each score category

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN PRODUCED BY:

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ABOUT Hong Kong Shark Foundation

The Hong Kong Shark Foundation (HKSF) is part of My Ocean, a registered Hong Kong charity dedicated to marine conservation.

Although HKSF members come from around the world, most live and work in Hong Kong. Regardless of nationality or ethnicity, we are united in our desire to conserve shark populations for future generations.

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