

Would you eat it?

It's five in the morning and the sea off Oman is bright red. Aamir Mohammed has just thrown a bloodied carcass over the side of his small fishing boat. It's a shark and it's Aamir's first catch of the day. It's still alive, but it's badly injured because its fin has been cut off. As Aamir tosses the fin into the empty hull of his boat, he worries about how he will support his family - shark numbers are down and the fish that he finds now are smaller than before. Meanwhile, under the boat, the shark is still struggling and unable to swim. As it slowly floats down to the bottom of the sea, smaller fish start to eat it alive. Its death will be long and agonizing.

In seas and oceans across the world, these awe-inspiring animals are being hunted to extinction. On average, three sharks are killed every second, or over 70 million a year. It's hardly surprising that in the last few years there has been a 90% decline in most shark populations. These are distressing statistics, but sharks don't have the same appeal as dolphins, so we don't feel much **empathy for** them. After all, these man-eating 'monsters' kill around ten people every year, so why should we care if they are being wiped out? Aren't we **better off without** them?

For 400 million years, sharks have played a critical role in maintaining balanced, healthy marine ecosystems. Sharks are apex predators and the caretakers of our oceans. **Based on** current evidence, marine biologists predict that losing this caretaker could bring about a significant **rise in** the number of smaller predators like stingrays. This would **result in** fewer fish, and also fewer shellfish, which keep the seas and oceans clean. An imbalance in the food chain could ultimately lead to the collapse of the underwater ecosystem, with a reduced fish population and more pollution. Everything and everyone who **depends on** the ocean for a living, or simply for recreation, would suffer. It'd be an environmental disaster with countless consequences for us all.

So why are people like Aamir Mohammed killing sharks? The reason is simple: shark fins are big business. The fins are the main **ingredient in** China's most prized dish - shark fin soup. This soup plays a significant part in Chinese culture and is often served at New Year and other important celebrations, where one bowl can cost as much as \$100. The price is surprising because shark fin is tasteless and mercury levels in the meat mean the soup is relatively unhealthy. Nevertheless, shark fin has a long culinary history, first appearing on the tables of the wealthy in 960 AD. This association with wealth and exclusivity continued through the centuries until the 1980s, when, **thanks to** a rise in prosperity in Asia, ordinary people started to buy it. The increased demand has put 181 different shark species on the **'threatened with** extinction' list.

But there is a glimmer of hope - a ban on finning could still save the shark population and, encouragingly, it has already been outlawed in some countries. However, not everyone supports this approach. Some people feel that banning shark fin soup is an **attack on** Chinese culture, and that we all have the right to eat our traditional foods. Seventeen-year-old Yuli Tan disagrees. 'I ate shark fin soup as a child,' she says. 'If it wasn't offered at important events, the host would lose face in front of his guests. But traditions can change, especially when they do more harm than good. Is it really necessary to slaughter 200,000 sharks a day just for? or a bowl of soup?'

In Oman, Aamir takes the fish he has caught to the market. Next to his tiny boat are monstrous fishing ships with hundreds of shark carcasses on board. More than a thousand can be sold here in a single day, but the sharks at these markets are only a **fraction of** the animals actually killed. It's a cold-blooded trade, but most fishermen aren't **concerned about** ethics because they need to make a living. Aamir looks at the long rows of shark fins, lined up on huge slabs in the market. Behind them the Arabian Sea, which used to be alive with fish, looks dead and still. Is this the future of our seas and oceans?

✓ Read the article again and choose the correct answers.

1. What is difficult for Aamir to do?

- a. make enough money to live on
- b. and kill sharks
- c. throw sharks off the boat
- d. carry dead sharks in the hull of his boat

2. What will happen if sharks disappear?

- a. Smaller predators will die out.
- b. The food chain will be more or less the same
- c. Marine ecosystems could be devastated
- d. Marine biologists can't predict the result.

3. Why are sharks being hunted?

- a. Because they are not endangered,
- b. Because they are like dolphins.
- c. Because they bring in a lot of money.
- d. Because they are used to make cheap food.

4. How does the article describe shark fin soup?

- a. It has a very strong taste.
- b. It has some health benefits.
- c. It has been enjoyed by ordinary people for centuries.
- d. It has been eaten for a long time.

5. What does Yuli Tan say about shark fin soup?

- a. It should be served at important events.
- b. She ate it when she was younger.
- c. It's a significant part of Asian culture.
- d. It's a tradition that should be preserved.