COMPARISON REPORT

THE 2009 AND 2014 SURVEYS ON SHARK CONSUMPTION HABITS AND ATTITUDES IN HONG KONG



BLOOM ASSOCIATION HONG KONG

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Since the completion of the first survey and the resulting press conference in 2011, so much work has been put into making possible the repeated survey in 2014 and this report that brings together two important pieces of research.

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Executive Summary

Hong Kong is famed for its traditional practice of eating shark fin soup at celebratory banquets, and in particular, wedding banquets. As the consumption of shark fin has become increasingly controversial in recent decades, an array of shark conservation efforts spearheaded by local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have targeted consumers with campaigns to reduce consumption.

Impacts of these consumer-targeted campaigns are not easily measurable. While there is little debate over the need for widespread education and awareness-raising regarding the ecological and environmental impacts of the overconsumption of shark fin, there had not been studies which focused on understanding how Hong Kong's general public felt toward the practice of eating shark fin soup.

In 2009, BLOOM Association Hong Kong (BLOOM HK) commissioned the Social Sciences Research Centre of The University of Hong Kong to conduct the first comprehensive sociological study, surveying over 1000 Hong Kong residents to find out the Hong Kong people's attitudes and behaviours when it came to the consumption of shark fin-related products. In 2014, the same survey was repeated, offering a comparison of change over time. The results of both surveys shows not only that people are increasingly finding it acceptable to spare shark fin from their bowls for environmental reasons, but also that most people are highly supportive of shark conservation efforts within Hong Kong, and especially efforts taken by the Hong Kong government.

Hong Kong is one of the world's greatest trade hubs of shark fin and related products. Because of the city's advantage as a tax-free port and accessibility into major shark fin consumer markets including mainland China, over 50% of the international shark fin trade will at some point pass through Hong Kong before re-export to other destination countries.

Over 90% of the 2014 survey's respondents expressed support for the Hong Kong government to regulate the international shark fin trade, and over 80% voted the Hong Kong government as one of the most important stakeholders for shark protection, alongside environmental NGOs, fishermen and traders, and the general public. It is also worth mentioning that 92.7% of respondents congratulated the Hong Kong government's decision in 2013 to exclude shark fin, Bluefin tuna and black moss dishes from all official banquets.

The time is ripe for the Hong Kong government to step up their efforts in shark protection, taking the lead in the international scene in the work of shark conservation. Hong Kong's advantage as an international trading hub also proves advantageous as a platform to regulate the international shark fin trade, by introducing stringent policies locally, such as demanding declaration of sources and trade routes of shark fin imports received in Hong Kong, imposing clear labelling of species involved in shark fin shipments, setting up designated landing ports for shark fin and other products involving endangered species of wildlife for easier inspection, and increasing the penalties for non-compliance.

Shark fin soup is symbolic of our culture and Chinese heritage. Ensuring the sustainability of the shark species is in turn to ensure the survival of a tradition several thousand years old. Many of this survey's respondents have, through changes in their attitude and behaviours, demonstrated their support for the protection of the animal. It is their hope and ours that the Hong Kong government would do no less.

摘要

香港的喜宴 (特別是婚宴) 傳統上都會提供魚翅羹，這是眾所周知的事。進食魚翅羹在近數十年變得越來越具爭議，不少國際性及本土的非政府組織，透過推動不同活動務求減低消費者食用魚翅的情況，以推行鯊魚保育工作。

這些以消費者為目標的活動，要衡量其影響並非易事。普遍認為有需要進行更廣泛的教育活動提高意識，讓更多人知道過度捕撈鯊魚作魚翅貿易，在生態及環境上的影響。儘管有此共識，但卻欠缺相關研究，未能了解香港市民大眾對進食魚翅羹的想法。

BLOOM 香港分部於 2009 年委託香港大學社會科學研究中心，進行首個全面的問卷調查，訪問逾一千香港市民了解其對進食鯊魚產品的態度及行為。雙方於 2014 年再次進行同樣調查，以比較市民態度及行為的轉變。兩年的結果除了顯示市民更願意基於環保理由將魚翅從餐單上剔除外，亦看到大部份受訪者均非常支持在香港境內推行鯊魚保育工作，特別是政府方面。

香港是全球最大的魚翅及鯊魚製品貿易樞紐之一，擁有免關稅以及鄰近主要魚翅市場 (包括中國大陸) 的優勢，約五成的國際魚翅貿易均會途經香港，再轉口至其他國家。

根據 2014 年的調查，逾九成受訪者表示支持香港政府管制魚翅的國際貿易，超過八成人認為香港政府是鯊魚保育的重要持份者之一，其餘為環保團體、漁民及貿易商，以及普羅大眾。值得一提的是，92.7%受訪者歡迎香港政府 2013 年的決定，政府所有的公務酬酢禁止食用魚翅、藍鰭吞拿魚及髮菜。

香港政府是時候提高保護鯊魚的力度，在國際舞台上帶領鯊魚保育工作，這個時機經已成熟。作為國際貿易樞紐，這個優勢同樣令香港有條件成為管制國際魚翅貿易的平台，透過執行更嚴謹的本地政策以作規管，如：要求進口商列明魚翅的來源及貿易路線、運送時必須有標籤清楚列明魚翅所屬的鯊魚品種、設立特定口岸集中處理魚翅及其他瀕危物種的產品以方便進行檢查，以及提高對違規行為的罰則。

魚翅羹是我們的文化及中國文化遺產的象徵。確保鯊魚的未來，同時亦可確保這個數百年的傳統得以延續。這項調查的許多受訪者，均以改變態度和行為表明對保護動物的支持。受訪者與我們一樣，都希望香港政府比市民做得更多。

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

I. Consumption patterns

Shark fin soup continues to be the most popular way that respondents are eating shark products; but reported consumption in the 12-months leading up to the surveys has decreased from 72.9% in 2009 to 44.1% in 2014. "**Environmental concerns**" remains the most important reason for respondents' decisions to eat less shark fin.

Pages 8 - 11

II. Time and place matter

Consistent with 2009's findings, the 2014 survey has found that **weddings** are still by far the most frequently named occasion for eating shark fin soup in restaurants. It is still most frequently encountered as a **part of a set menu**, and not ordered separately. It is also rarely eaten at home.

Pages 12 - 13

III. Majority accepts "substituted-shark fin" banquets

Acceptability for **excluding shark fin soup from weddings** is growing, reaching 92.0% in 2014. Respondents also increasingly find the inclusion of shark fin soup in weddings and corporate events either "not so important" or "not important at all".

Pages 14 - 17

IV. Faulty perceptions

Some in 2009 believed that sharks can continue to survive after being finned; while some in 2014, **believed that sharks' fins can grow back after being cut off**. Furthermore, the number of people killed by sharks on average continues to be hugely **overestimated**, and the number of sharks killed for human use each year remains **underestimated**. However, possible signs of growing awareness for this topic are emerging in the 2014 results.

Pages 18 - 19

V. Change is in the air

A growing percentage of respondents are feeling **uncomfortable** with eating threatened species of fish, and over 90% in 2014 are uncomfortable with eating endangered species of animals and plants.

Pages 20 - 23

VI. Support for HK Government efforts

Up to 92.7% of all respondents have showed support for the HK government's decision to remove shark fin (also bluefin tuna and black moss) dishes from official banquets for sustainability reasons in 2013. The 2014 survey also found that the majority shows support for the HK **government to do more in regulating the international shark trade.**

Pages 24 - 26

INTRODUCTION

"The Government is determined to take the lead and set a good example on this front that goes beyond the minimum expectation as laid down in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)".

(Government of HKSAR, 2013)
13 September, 2013

Hong Kong is one of the world's greatest trading hubs for shark fin-related products. It is also one of the few cities in the world with an infamous appetite for shark fin. Between the years of 1998 to 2014, the value of shark fins imported into Hong Kong reportedly averaged USD 267 million (C&SD, 2015). While a portion of the fins are retained within Hong Kong, presumably for local consumption, a large percentage of the fins are typically re-exported to other destination countries.

Although shark fin and shark-related products are consumed in many places worldwide, it is among the Chinese population where the use of shark fin for soup is made a part of an important culture. Supported by customary practices that are over a thousand years old, the use of shark fin in soups served in traditional celebratory banquets, especially weddings, continues to thrive.

Hong Kong's consumption of shark fin had soared in the past decades, as reflected in the import volumes since 1980s (CSD, 2015). While shark fin soup may have been a dish only accessible to the wealthy in the distant past, Hong Kong's surging affluence since the 1970s meant that the dish had become affordable to many.

Numerous shark conservation efforts have hence targeted the consumers of shark fin, with the goal of reducing the city's demand for shark fin from the end consumers. However, studies to understand how Hong Kong's population truly felt about eating shark fin, and how frequently they actually ate it, had been few. In comparison to the effort and resources invested into other types of research for shark conservation (such as local trade data analysis to identify key suppliers and receivers of shark fin, relative importance identification of shark species traded as shark fin, or policy directions to achieve tighter regulation on local trades), official research into the consumer demand for shark fin was found wanting.

Such types of research that try to understand consumer attitudes and behaviours in relation to shark fin consumption is valuable in directing future consumer-targeted shark conservation efforts, which were previously based on scattered sources and assumptions.

In 2009, BLOOM Association Hong Kong (BLOOM HK) commissioned the Social Science Research Centre of The University of Hong Kong (HKU SSRC) to conduct a survey, interviewing over 1,000 Hong Kong residents on their habits and attitudes in

relation to consuming shark fin, providing a baseline study for local consumption patterns and trends. The study had revealed that the vast majority of Hong Kong people no longer view shark fin soup as a staple for celebration banquets, and found a high acceptance for the dish to be replaced by other foods. Most of the respondents also expressed discomfort with knowingly eating threatened or endangered species, and showed great support for the local government to take a more active part in shark conservation work, whether by more securely regulating the local shark fin trade or other means.

In 2014, five years after the first study, BLOOM HK commissioned the HKU SSRC to undertake the survey once again in Hong Kong. The goal of repeating the survey was to find out how attitudes and behaviours might have changed in the years passed:

Did people consume shark fin more or less frequently?
Were weddings still the main occasions for consuming shark fin soup?
Did respondents continue to express support for the government to do more?
Did they grow more or less aware of the environmental consequences associated with consuming shark products?
How did the general public feel about the Hong Kong government's decision to eliminate shark fin and Bluefin tuna from all their official banquets for sustainability reasons?

The results of the 2014 survey showed that Hong Kong people are supporting efforts to bring about greater protection for sharks.

Frequency of consumption appears to have decreased, and willingness to support local initiative to better protect shark populations worldwide has grown even greater. Perhaps the most important implication from the survey is that the momentum for shark conservation in Hong Kong remains strong, if not increasingly strong.

However, the work of shark conservation is far from complete. Although in this survey consumption appears to be decreasing, there has yet to be any research indicating levels of consumption that can be met with sustainable solutions. With the growing interest for protecting sharks and endangered species among the public, and more importantly, the growing support for the Hong Kong government to step up to take a leading role in the matter, Hong Kong's efforts must now double, not dwindle.

As suggested in the introduction of the report of the 2009 survey, it would be highly worthwhile to conduct the same survey among residents of other countries regarded to have high rate of shark fin consumption, in particular mainland China, to gain an understanding of the thoughts of the consumers where the bulk of the global demand appears to be, and to offer a comparison to the situation found in Hong Kong.

What is sustainable?

In 2015, trade data from the Hong Kong Census & Statistics Department (CSD) showed that 5 500+ metric tons of shark fin were imported into Hong Kong in that year alone.

Consumption has evidently been in decline, yet the question remains: how far are we from the goal of sustainability? Published research on what can be considered a sustainable level of consumption is still found lacking.

Sustainability in the shark fin trade is an important goal that must be reached to balance consumption and conservation. Ultimately, it is up to the local government to regulate imports, ensuring that consumers will not unknowingly consume threatened species or illegally traded fins. While the search for sustainable consumption levels continues, efforts to regulate existing consumption are equally important.

METHODOLOGY

2014's survey is a repetition of the survey conducted in 2009. For this reason, the methodology of the 2009 survey will be explained here, followed by updates made in 2014.

The 2009 Survey

Over 1,000 telephone interviews with Hong Kong residents were successfully completed by the HKUSSRC between December 2009 and January 2010. The interviews were carried out in Cantonese, English, or Putonghua. Interview questions were standardized by a pre-designed questionnaire.

Questionnaire design

To initiate the process of survey design, four focus groups were set up for consultation and to help explore observable habits in the consumption of shark fin and other shark-related products in Hong Kong. Each group represented specific segments of the public, including elders, wedding planners and restaurant managers, housewives, and secretaries (with experience of organizing corporate events).

Based on the outcomes from the discussions of the 4 focus groups, a questionnaire of 69 multiple choice, close ended, and open ended questions was put together in a combined effort by BLOOM and the HKUSSRC. Apart from 5 questions relating to the personal information of interviewees, all remaining questions were designed around four distinct categories: habits, knowledge, perception and attitudes.

These translated into questions that surrounded the topics of:

a. Frequency of and occasions for consuming shark fin and other shark-related products,
b. Feelings towards eating shark fin soup,
c. Willingness to limit personal shark fin consumption and acceptability of reduced consumption in social contexts,
d. Understanding of conservation issues surrounding shark consumption,
e. Perception of existing shark conservation efforts (e.g. by Hong Kong government, NGOs, etc), and
f. Support for increased government effort on issues of shark and marine conservation.

The questions were designed in both English and Chinese. Options of 'don't know', 'can't remember', and 'no opinion' were made available to respondents who may feel uncomfortable with answering the listed questions, or if they did not understand what was asked (Converse and Presser 1986, De Vaus 2002). The option of 'others (please specify)' was also offered for unprecedented answers and to specify a set of substantive choices (De Vaus 2002, Krosnick and Presser 2010).

Questions with an assigned five-point rating scale (i.e. strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree) were used to evaluate the level of importance and interviewees' agreement according to the statements made (Likert

1932, Clason and Dormody 1994, Gliem and Gliem 2003). Statements with both positive and negative dimensions were also used in the questionnaire to detect a respondent's tendency to acquiesce, or providing affirmative responses to the statements regardless of the question content (Winkler et al. 1982, Ross et al. 1995).

Interview sampling

The entire survey process, from sampling through to results analysis, was conducted and overseen by the HKUSSRC.

Random sampling of interviewees was drawn and generated from the latest English residential directory at the time. Each number was tried, and if unanswered, was tried at least 3 times before being classified as a 'noncontact' case. This method yielded a total of 1,029 successful, computer-assisted telephone interviews.

Respondents were all Hong Kong citizens, who were adults of age 18 or above. There were representatives of various ages, levels of education and occupations.

In view of the demographic distribution differences between the current survey and the actual Hong Kong population, weighting was applied to gender and age group in order to make the results more representative of the general population according to the C&SD (2014) demographic data.

The 2014 Survey

When the study was repeated in 2014, the HKUSSRC utilized the same methodology as described for the 2009 survey.

Quality Control

"All SSRC interviewers were well trained in a standardized approach prior to the commencement of the survey. All interviews were conducted by experienced interviewers fluent in Cantonese, Putonghua and English.

The SSRC engaged in quality assurance for each stage of the survey to ensure satisfactory standards of performance. At least 5% of the questionnaires completed by each interviewer were checked by the SSRC supervisors independently."

(HKUSSRC, 2015)

Between 17th September and 7th November 2014, over 1,000 telephone interviews were successfully completed. Weighting for gender and age group was also applied, according to the C&SD (2014) demographic data.

Some questions from the original questionnaire were updated based on 2009 results, so that irrelevant questions may be removed and topics that became relevant in the five years since the first survey may be included. For example, one section enquiring respondents' opinions on the Hong Kong government's decision to remove shark fin, bluefin tuna and black moss dishes for all official banquets in 2013 was added to the 2014 questionnaire.

In the interest of yielding statistically comparable results, however, changes to the original questionnaire were kept to a minimal.

KEY FINDINGS

I. CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

1. Shark fin soup remains, in both years, by far the most common way that shark is consumed in Hong Kong compared to other shark related products.

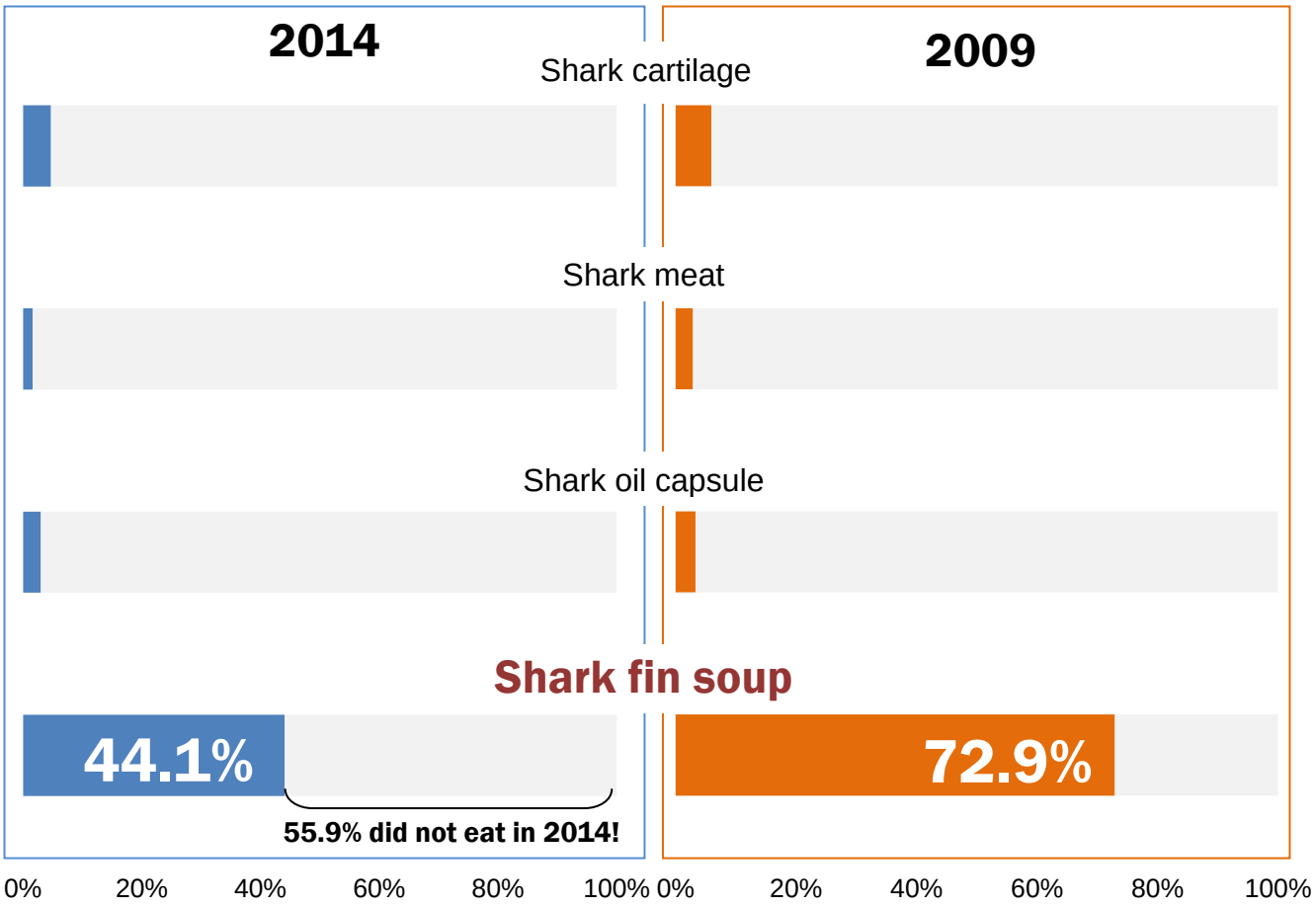


Figure 1.1 - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: consumption of different shark-related products at least once in the 12-month period leading up to the survey

Shark fin soup remains the most common way that shark is consumed by respondents in both survey years, eaten at least once in the 12 months leading up to the survey by 44.1% of respondents in 2014 and 72.9% in 2009. All other shark products included in the survey, namely shark cartilage, shark meat, and shark oil capsule, were each consumed by only fewer than 6% of the respondents for both years.

Despite its popularity when compared to other shark products, consumption for shark fin soup evidently decreased since 2009. By 2014, 55.9% of respondents reported **had not consumed shark fin soup even once** in the 12-months leading up to the survey, almost doubling since 2009 (27.1%).

2. Taste and tradition remain important reasons for consuming shark fin soup. Social status remains unimportant.

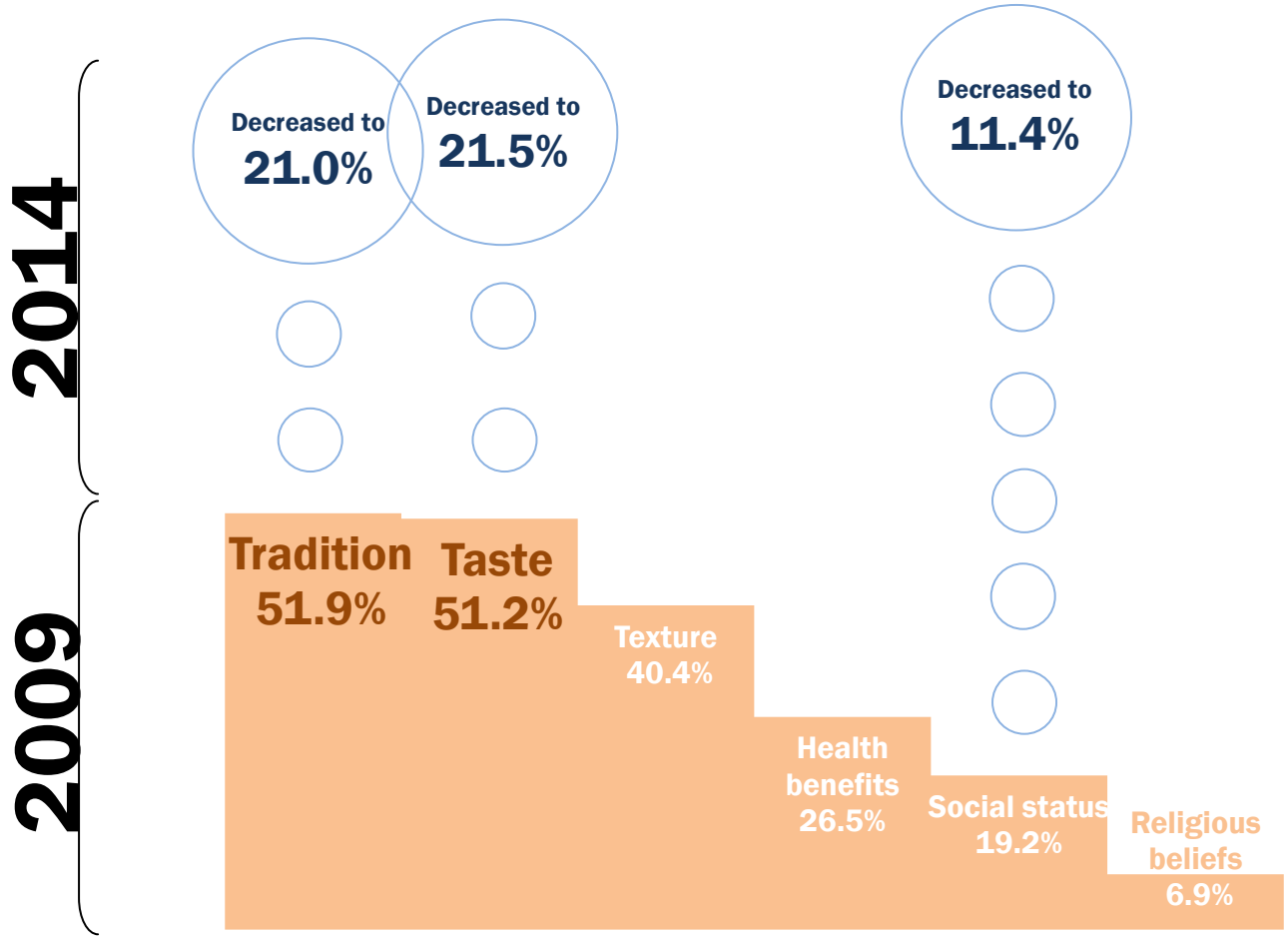


Figure 1.2 - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: percentage of respondents voting each category as "Very important" or "important" as reasons for consuming shark fin soup

In 2009, "tradition" (10.0% "Very important"; 41.9% "Important") and "taste" (14.4% "Very important"; 36.8% "Important) both stood out as the most prominent reasons for consuming shark fin soup. This was in line with the general opinion that the consumption of shark fin soup continues because it is an important part of the Chinese culture. Tastiness also appeared to be a feature of shark fin soup that drove consumption. Social status was deemed relatively unimportant (3.2% "Very important; 16.0% "Important").

In 2014, respondents were only given the choices of "tradition", "taste" and "social status" to the same question. Responses for all three categories had decreased, to 21.0%, 21.5% and 11.4% respectively. Notably, "tradition" and "taste" continue to hold an almost equal level of importance, while the importance of "social status" remained relatively low.

3. Despite continued consumption, even more respondents had decreased their consumption of shark fin soup in 2014 compared to 2009.

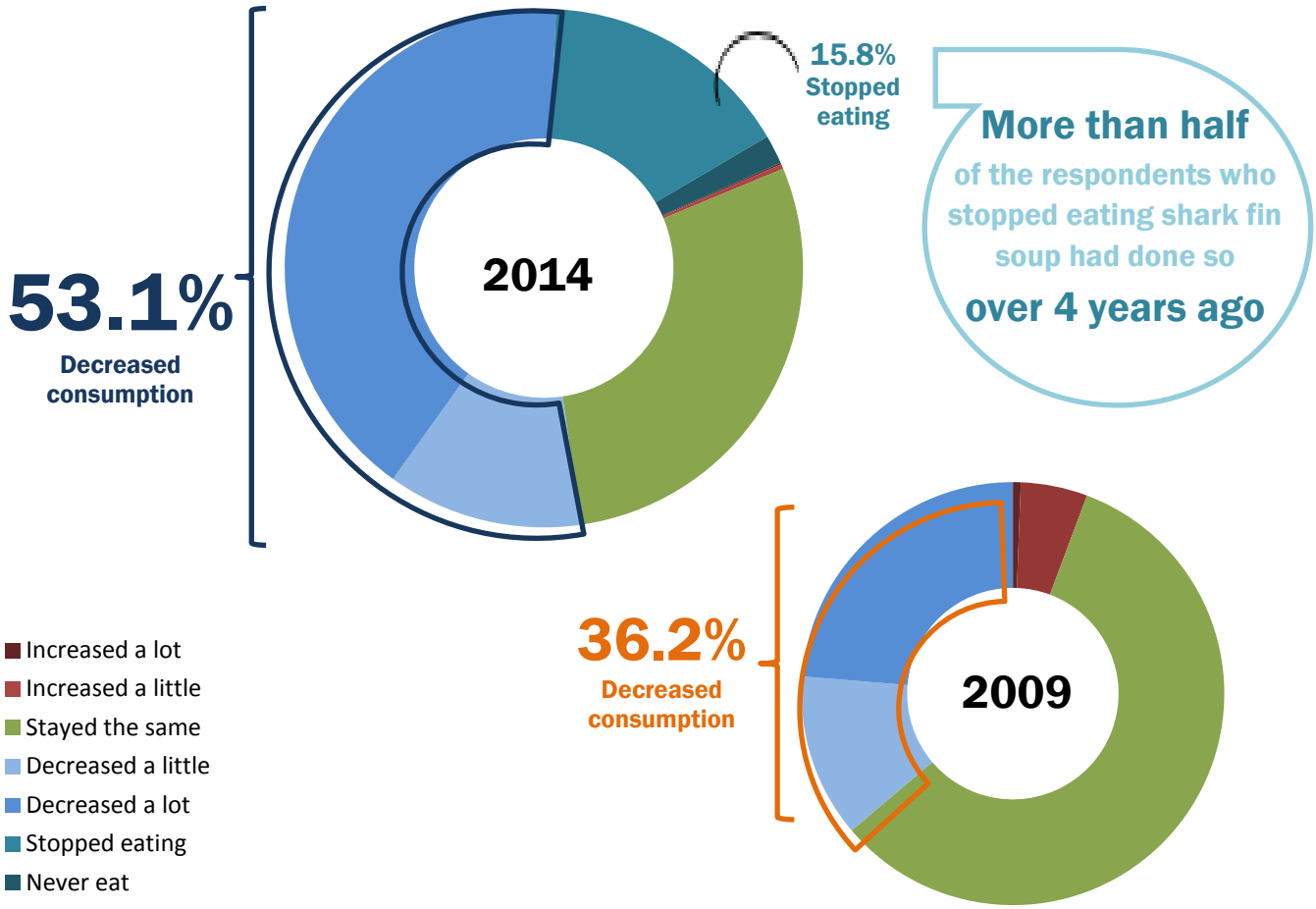


Figure 1.3a - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: changes in frequency of shark fin soup consumption over the 5 years leading up to the survey

There has been a shift of dominance between 2009 and 2014 between respondents whose frequency of shark fin soup consumption had "Stayed the same" (decreasing from 58.1% in 2009 to 29.0% in 2014) to those whose consumption had decreased (increasing from 36.2% in 2009 to 53.1% in 2014).

It appears that the greatest change came from individuals aged 18-29, where the percentage for "Stayed the same" fell from 71.8% in 2009 to only 36.2% in 2014, and that of "Decreased a lot" rose from 6.8% in 2009 to 33.6% in 2014. It may be speculated that, as no-fin banquets and awareness for shark conservation are increasingly becoming a trend for the younger generations, their corresponding behavioural change is reflected in the results of this survey.

Notably, in 2014, respondents were further given the options of "Never eat" and "Stopped eating" to this question. Up to 15.8% of respondents had "stopped eating" shark fin soup by 2014. Of these people, more than half (58.2%) had stopped "over 4 years ago".

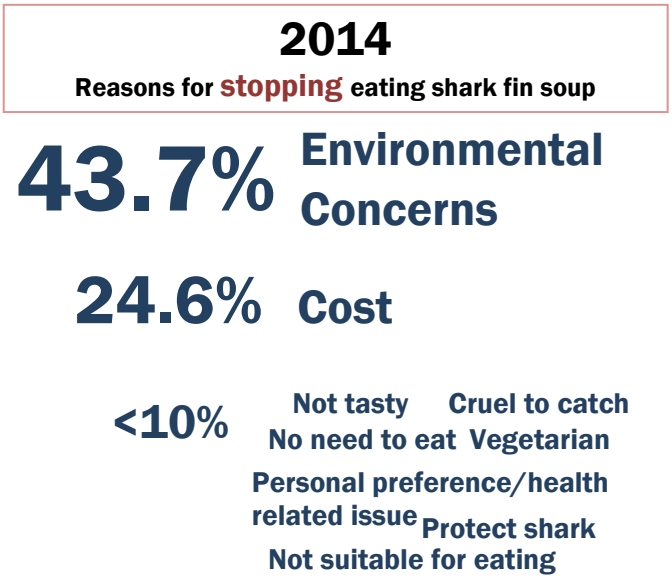


Figure 1.3b - 2014: Reasons stated for stopping eating shark fin soup

As a reason for *ceasing* consumption, 43.7% of the respondents in 2014 chose "environmental concerns", making this option the most popular.

"Cost of shark fin soup", although significantly less popular than "environmental concerns", was the second most opted category, reaching 24.6%.

Notably, 18.7% of the respondents reportedly stopped eating shark fin soup for "no specific reason". All other reasons fell below 10% popularity.

4. "Environmental concerns" was persistently the most important reason for **decreasing** consumption of shark fin soup

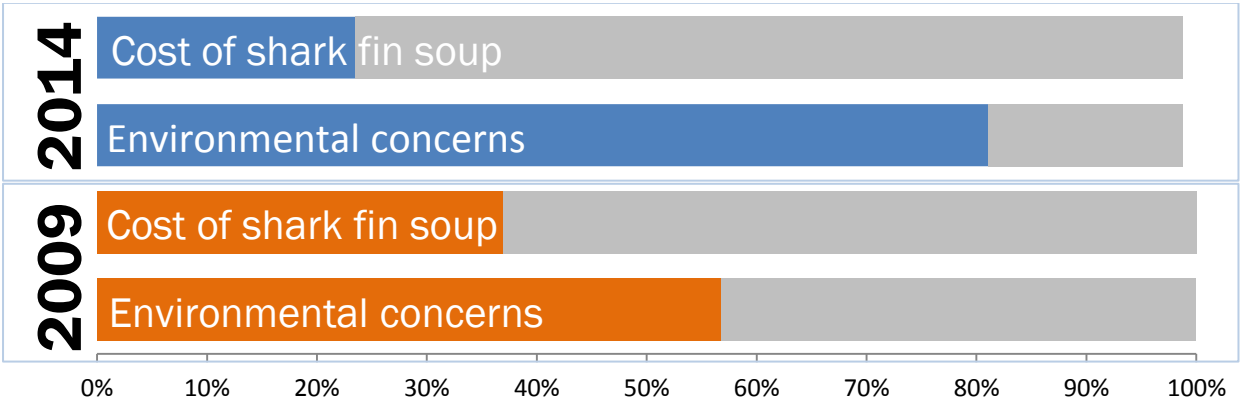


Figure 1.4 - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: "Cost of shark fin soup" and "environmental concerns" as reasons for decreased consumption

As a reason for *decreasing* consumption, "environmental concerns" evidently grew increasingly important since 2009 (56.8%) as testified by the 81.1% of the respondents in 2014.

Fewer respondents thought that "cost of shark fin soup" was an important reason, falling from 36.9% in 2009 to 23.5% in 2014. In both years the majority of respondents (63.1% in 2009; 75.3% in 2014) did not find that "cost of shark fin soup" a reason that was important at all.

II. TIME AND PLACE MATTER

1. Very few people consumed shark fin soup at home and general consumption appears to have decreased

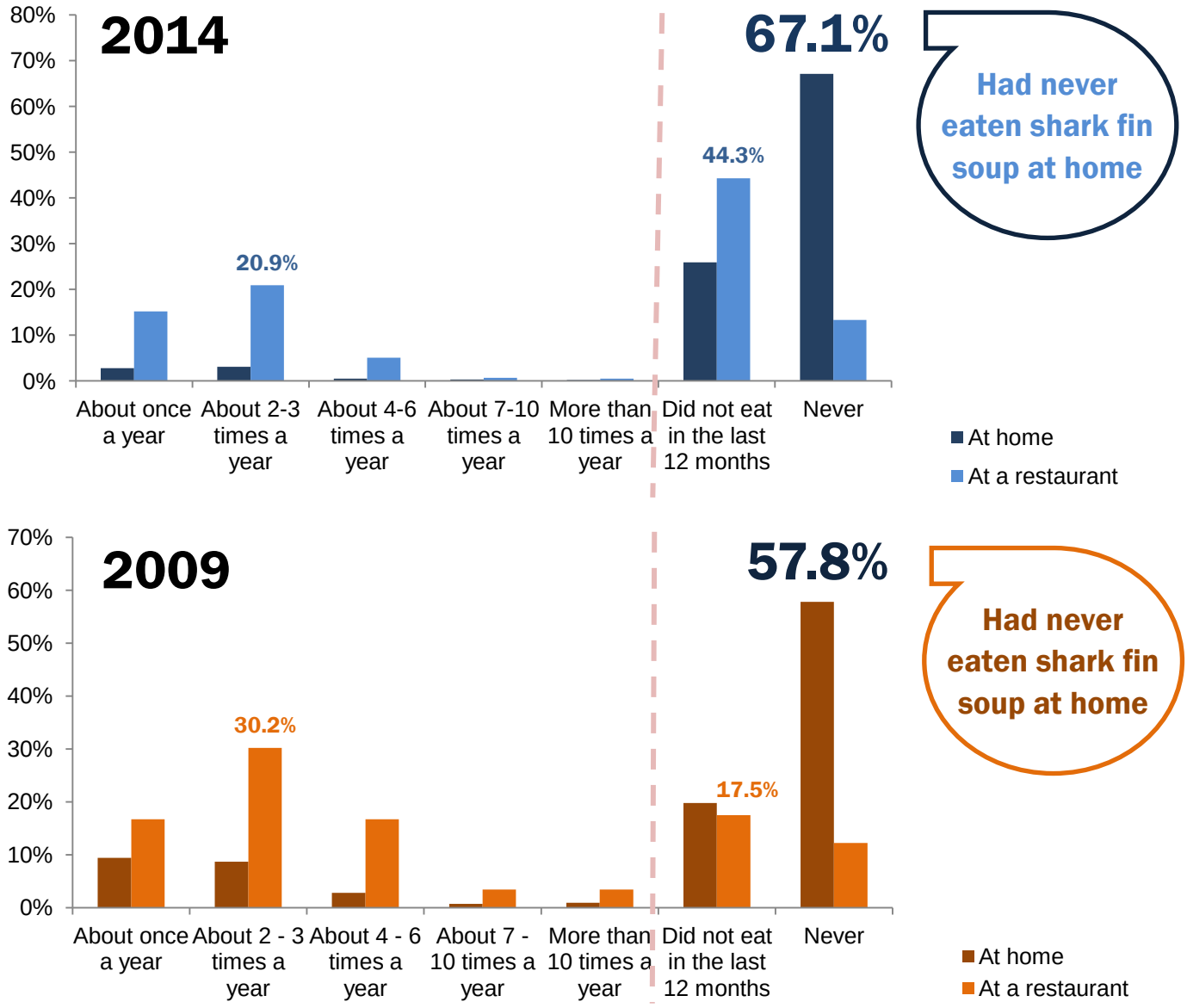


Figure 2.1 - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: Frequency of consuming shark fin soup at home versus at a restaurant

Shark fin soup is clearly consumed far more often at restaurants (total: 42.4% 2014; 70.4% 2009) than at home (total: 6.9% 2014; 22.5% 2009). Consistently, the majority of the people **had never eaten shark fin soup at home**, highlighting the importance of restaurants and food catering outlets in providing guidance to how shark fin is consumed.

Notably in 2009, the majority of respondents (30.2%) had eaten shark fin soup at a restaurant at least 2-3 times in a year. In 2014, this category had fallen to 20.9%.

2. Shark fin soup continues to be most often consumed at wedding banquets, and as a part of a set menu rather than ordered separately

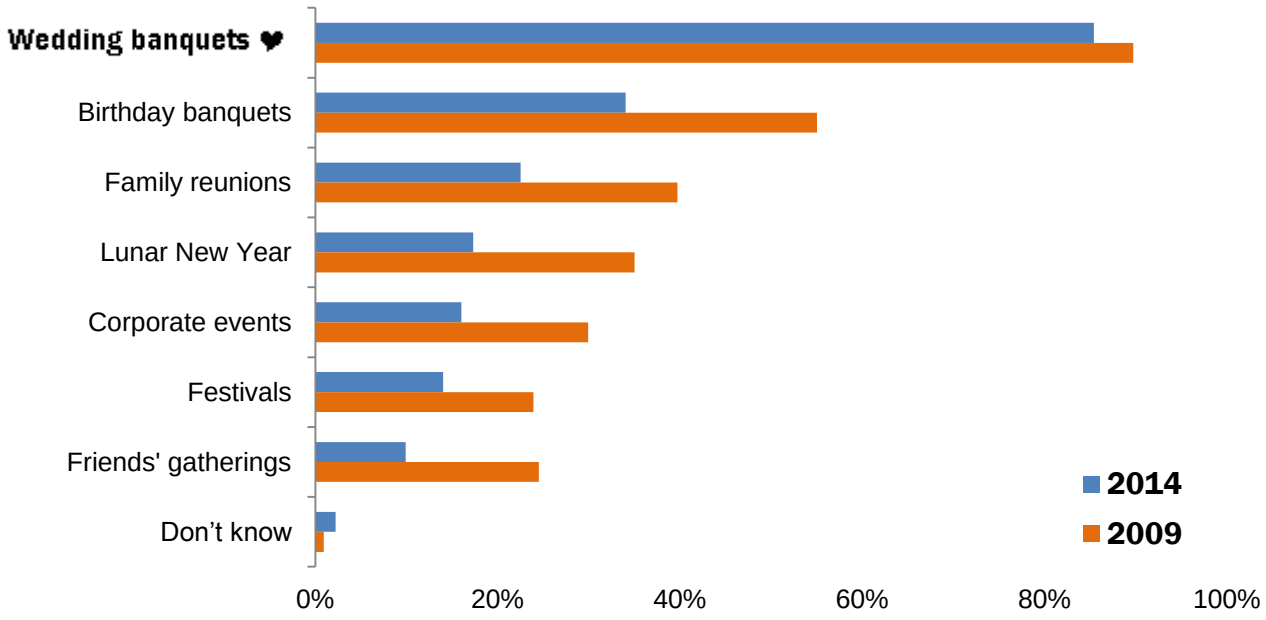
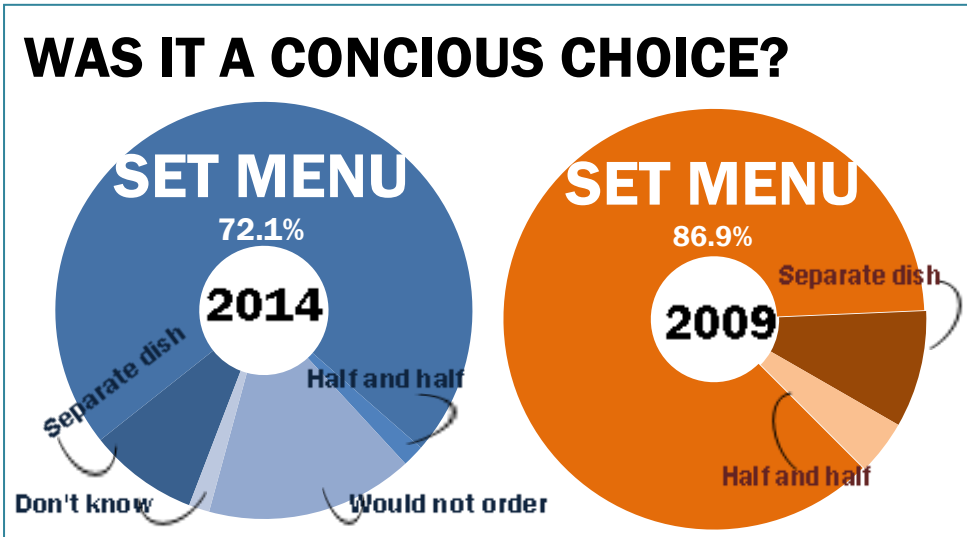


Figure 2.2 - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: Most popular occasions <u>overall</u> for consuming shark fin soup

Percentages exclude respondents who had "never eaten shark fin at a restaurant" in figure 2.1.

By far, the most popular occasion for consuming shark fin soup at a restaurant in both years is "wedding banquets". While the relative importance of the different occasions for consuming shark fin soup remains similar between the two years, percentages for 2014 are consistently lower than those of 2009. This suggests that individual respondents may be consuming shark fin at fewer different occasions in 2014 than in 2009.



In both years, the majority of the respondents who consumed shark fin soup at restaurants had encountered the dish as a part of a set menu. Very few people had voluntarily ordered the soup as a separate dish.

Figure 2.3 - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: <u>Overall</u> consumption frequency of shark fin ordered as part of a set menu versus as a separate dish

III. MARJORITY ACCEPTS "SUBSTITUTED-SHARK FIN" BANQUETS

1. Consistently, most people find it acceptable to remove shark fin soup from set menus of weddings and corporate events

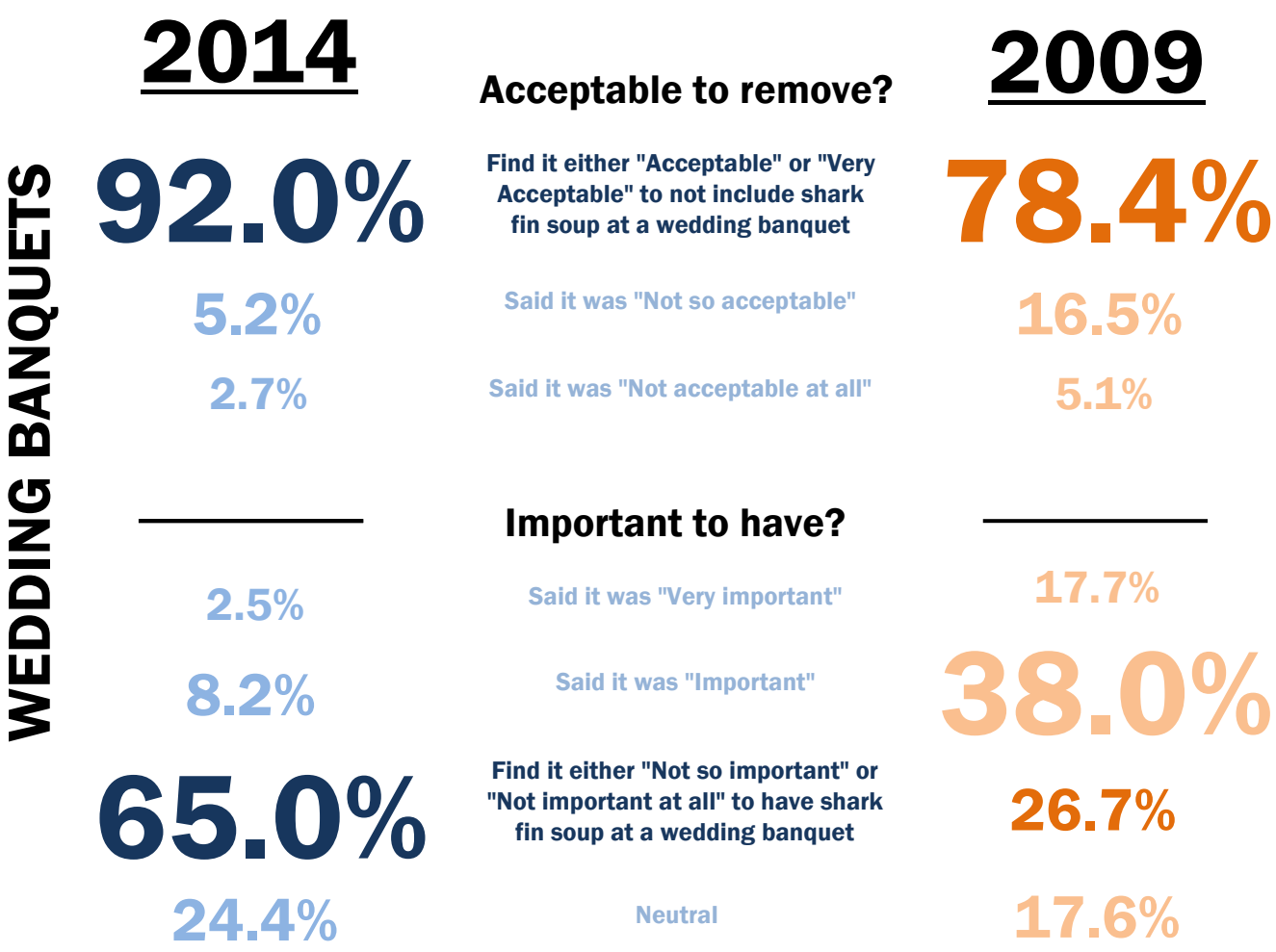
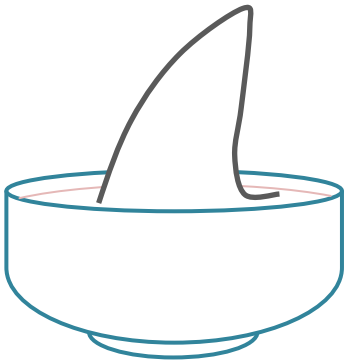


Figure 3.1a - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: Acceptability of removing shark fin soup from wedding banquets, and their perceived importance in being included

Percentage of respondents opting "Very acceptable" for not including shark fin soup in wedding banquet menus more than doubled from 19.6% in 2009 to 48.7% in 2014. Collectively, 92% of respondents expressed that it was either "Very acceptable" (48.7%) or "Acceptable" (43.3%) to exclude shark fin soup at wedding banquets in 2014. This has increased from the 78.4% (19.6% "Very acceptable; 58.8% "Acceptable") in 2009.



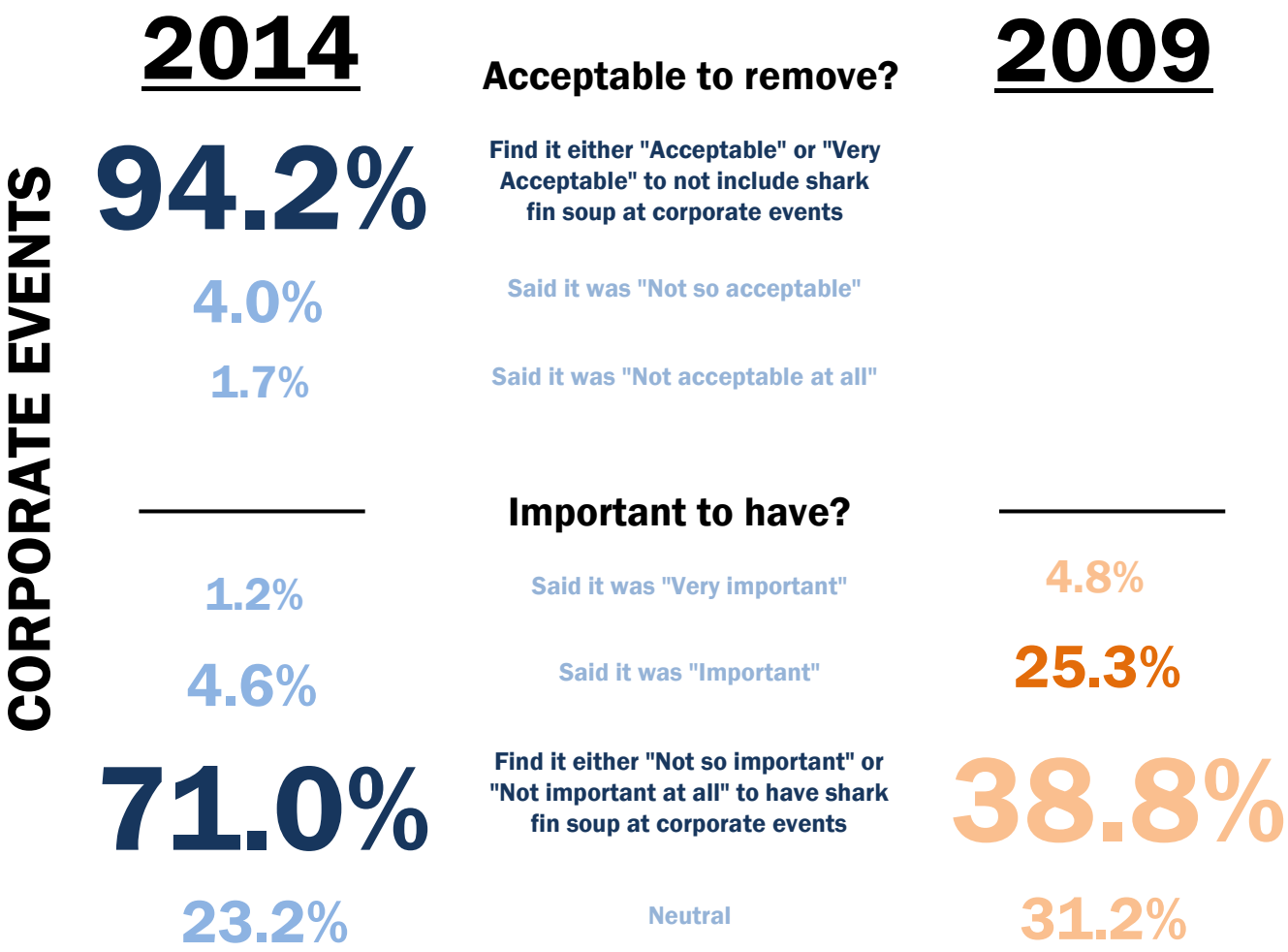
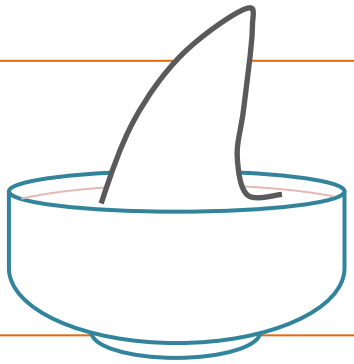


Figure 3.1b - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: Acceptability of removing shark fin soup from corporate events, and their perceived importance in being included

"Corporate events" was selected to offer a comparison to "Wedding banquets" for the importance of having shark fin soup in menus. In 2014, only 2.5% and 8.2% of respondents found having shark fin soup respectively "very important" or "important" -- a significant decrease compared to the respective 17.7% and 38% in 2009.

Corporate events are an integral part of Hong Kong's working culture. As these events will often take the form of traditional Chinese banquets, engaging the corporate sector and encouraging them to establish policies to substitute the shark fin soup for other foods in company banquets (as the Hong Kong government has done so for official banquets) would be a beneficial next step to local conservation efforts.



2. Most people still find it acceptable to use substitutes to shark fin soup at banquets

2014

In 2014, respondents were given more choices than in 2009 about what they have considered for replacing shark fin in banquets:

- ✓ Soups (39.7%)
- ✓ Meat (10.2%)
- ✓ Vegetarian shark fin (9.9%)
- ✓ Collagen food (9.8%)
- ✓ Bird's nest (8.7%)
- ✓ Fish maw (8.4%)
- ✓ Vermicelli (6.2%)
- ✓ Seafood (3.6%)
- ✓ Abalone (3.0%)
- ✓ Sea cucumber (1.7%)
- ✓ Bamboo fungus (0.7%)

- ✓ Any other food (7.6%)
- ✓ No need to replace (3.9%)
- ✓ Cannot be replaced (0.7%)

Don't know (2.1%)

2009



In 2009, 42.8% of respondents express having once thought of substitutes to replace shark fin soup in menus.

Substitutes found either "Acceptable" or "Very acceptable":

- ✓ Fish maw (79.0%)
- ✓ Bêche-de-mer (73.2%)
- ✓ Vegetarian shark fin (61.2%)
- ✓ Chinese caterpillar fungus stew (59.7%)
- ✓ Bird's nest (58.7%)

Figure 3.2 - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: Substitutes to shark fin at banquets willingly considered by respondents

In the 2009 survey, respondents were asked whether or not they had once thought of replacing shark fin soup in banquets with substitute dishes, and 42.8% had answered "yes". Respondents were then given a choice of five pre-decided possible substitutes to indicate their preferences. Of these five choices, "fish maw" and "bêche-de-mer" were the most popular, opted for by 79.0% and 73.2% of respondents respectively.

In 2014, respondents were given seven pre-decided possible substitutes to shark fin soup at banquets to indicate their preference. In addition, respondents were also given the option of answering "others". Given this open-ended question, the respondents suggested substitutes of "soups", "meat", "collagen food" "seafood" and "bamboo fungus". There is a clear preference for "soups" as opted for by 39.7% of the respondents. Up to 7.6% of respondents also thought that shark fin soup was replaceable by "any other food".

Notably, 3.9% of the respondents thought that there was "no need to replace" shark fin soup in banquets, and a further 0.7% believed that the dish "cannot be replaced". Although this represents only a small portion of respondents, it demonstrates a residual feeling of the necessity of having shark fin soup at banquet events.

SUSTAINABILITY OF SHARK FIN SUBS

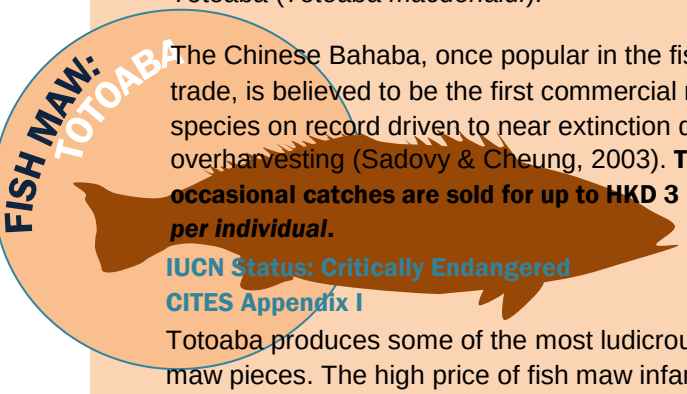
Some foods currently used to substitute shark fin soup at weddings are also tied with various conservation concerns. Consumers should take care in selecting their substitutes to avoid putting other species at risk.

MAKE THE SUSTAINABLE CHOICE NOW TO LEAVE MORE FOR THE FUTURE

FISH MAW

Extraction of the fish bladder to produce fish maw has led to fish species becoming threatened, such as the Chinese Bahaba (*Bahaba taipingensis*) and Totoaba (*Totoaba macdonaldi*).

FISH MAW: TOTOABA



The Chinese Bahaba, once popular in the fish maw trade, is believed to be the first commercial marine species on record driven to near extinction due to overharvesting (Sadovy & Cheung, 2003). **Today, occasional catches are sold for up to HKD 3 million *per individual*.**

IUCN Status: Critically Endangered
CITES Appendix I

Totoaba produces some of the most ludicrous fish maw pieces. The high price of fish maw infamously drove the totoaba onto Appendix II of CITES as early as 1975. Methods used in capturing totoaba has led to its neighbour, the vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*), also becoming critically endangered (Rojas-Bracho, 2008).

SEA CUCUMBERS

50+% of global trades will come through Hong Kong (To & Shea, 2012).

Also known as bêche-de-mer, some fisheries have already been proved to be declining, threatening the resource's sustainability.

SWALLOW'S NEST and CHINESE CATERPILLAR FUNGUS

These non-seafood substitutes are also regarded by Chinese and other cultures as precious foods.

Overexploitation has led the Chinese Caterpillar Fungus populations to decline in the wild.

Extraction methods of swallow's nest, although relatively sustainable, have also led to animal welfare concerns.

ABALONE

Some species of abalone are known to be involved in **illegal fishing** activities.

In particular, abalone fisheries in South Africa are **poorly managed** and abalones are **wild caught** instead of farmed, leading to those species sever depletion (WWF-HK, 2008).

In 2014

12.6% had eaten HHW in the past year

29.4% had it at "Friends' gatherings"

28.0% had it at "Family reunions"

10.9% had it at "Wedding banquets"

FRIENDLY SUBS:

Shark fin-like:

- ✓ **Vegetarian shark fin**
- ✓ **Vermicelli**

Other foods:

- ✓ **Soups and broths**
- ✓ **Dishes made with Sustainable Seafood**

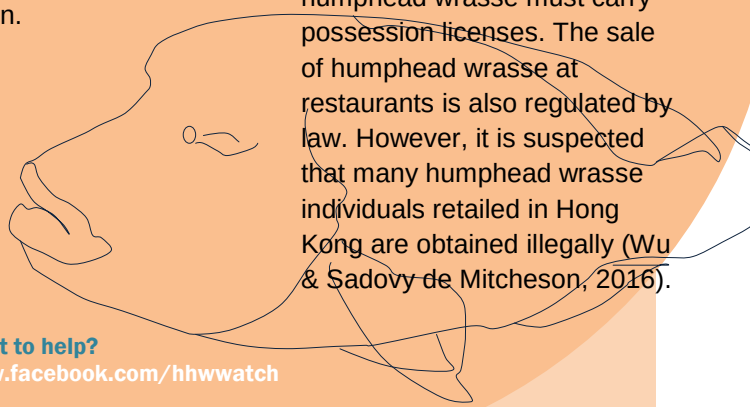
HUMPHEAD WRASSE

The humphead wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*) has long been favoured by Hong Kong people. Like shark fin, they are considered "luxury seafood".

Despite relatively high retail prices, the fish is commonly found swimming around tanks of local seafood restaurants, waiting to be eaten.

IUCN Status: Endangered
CITES Appendix II

Due to their dwindling wild populations, the sale of humphead wrasse is regulated under CITES. In Hong Kong, restaurants selling live humphead wrasse must carry possession licenses. The sale of humphead wrasse at restaurants is also regulated by law. However, it is suspected that many humphead wrasse individuals retailed in Hong Kong are obtained illegally (Wu & Sadovy de Mitcheson, 2016).



Want to help?
www.facebook.com/hhwwatch

IV. FAULTY PERCEPTIONS

1. A small percentage of people still hold mistaken beliefs about the sources of shark fins and the ability of sharks to survive after finning

Are the sharks of shark fins wild-caught or farmed?

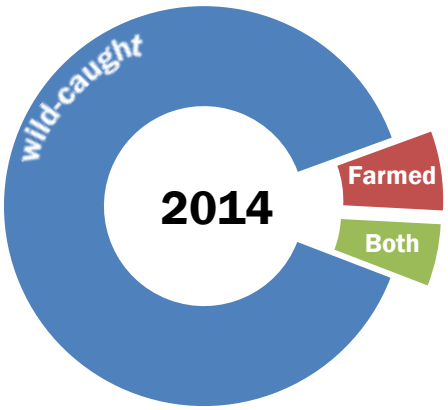


Figure 4.1a - 2014: Perceived sources of shark fin

Can fins grow back after being cut off?

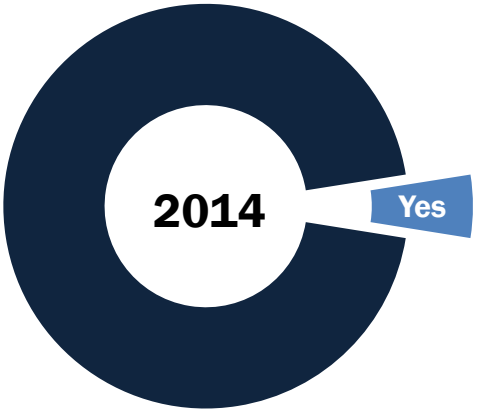


Figure 4.1b - 2014: Perceived ability of a shark's fins to grow back after being cut off

Can sharks survive after their fins are cut off?

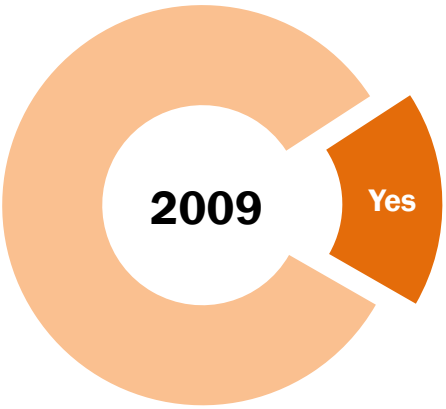


Figure 4.1c - 2009: Perceived ability of sharks to survive after fins are cut off

The majority of the respondents hold accurate knowledge on basic facts about sharks. However, a small percentage of respondents remain unaware of certain facts relevant to the susceptibility of sharks to unsustainable consumption.

In 2009, 16.7% of respondents thought that sharks are able to survive after their fins are cut off.

In 2014, respondents were instead asked whether or not they thought sharks could grow back their fins after having been finned. To this question, 5.0% said "yes". This year, respondents were further asked whether they thought the shark fin available for sale in Hong Kong are harvested from wild or farmed sources of sharks. Although 88.6% were aware that the sharks are all wild-caught, 6.4% thought that the sharks are farmed, and a further 5.0% thought that the sharks are from both farmed and wild-caught sources.

Sustainable Fins, Shark Farms?

While "farmed" sharks could be a sustainable solution to meeting the world's demand for shark fin, regulations must be put in place to meet current challenges obstructing the way for sustainable shark fins. For one, there are no publicly known farmed shark fisheries that support the shark fin trade at present. Even if these farmed fins do exist in our market, they are indistinguishable from wild-caught fins. More importantly, farmed sharks, like many other farmed fisheries, often rely on wild-caught juveniles to replenish stocks and harvest other marine species as feed, hence the problem of sustainability is not solved.

We must look forward to sustainable shark fisheries as a solution to the demand for shark products in the future. Efforts must be invested into identifying sustainable consumption levels for shark fin, encouraging the development of sustainable shark fisheries, and readying local regulations that help distinguish sustainable trades from unsustainable ones.

2. Number of people killed by sharks each year is grossly overestimated. On the other hand, number of sharks killed for human consumption is far underestimated

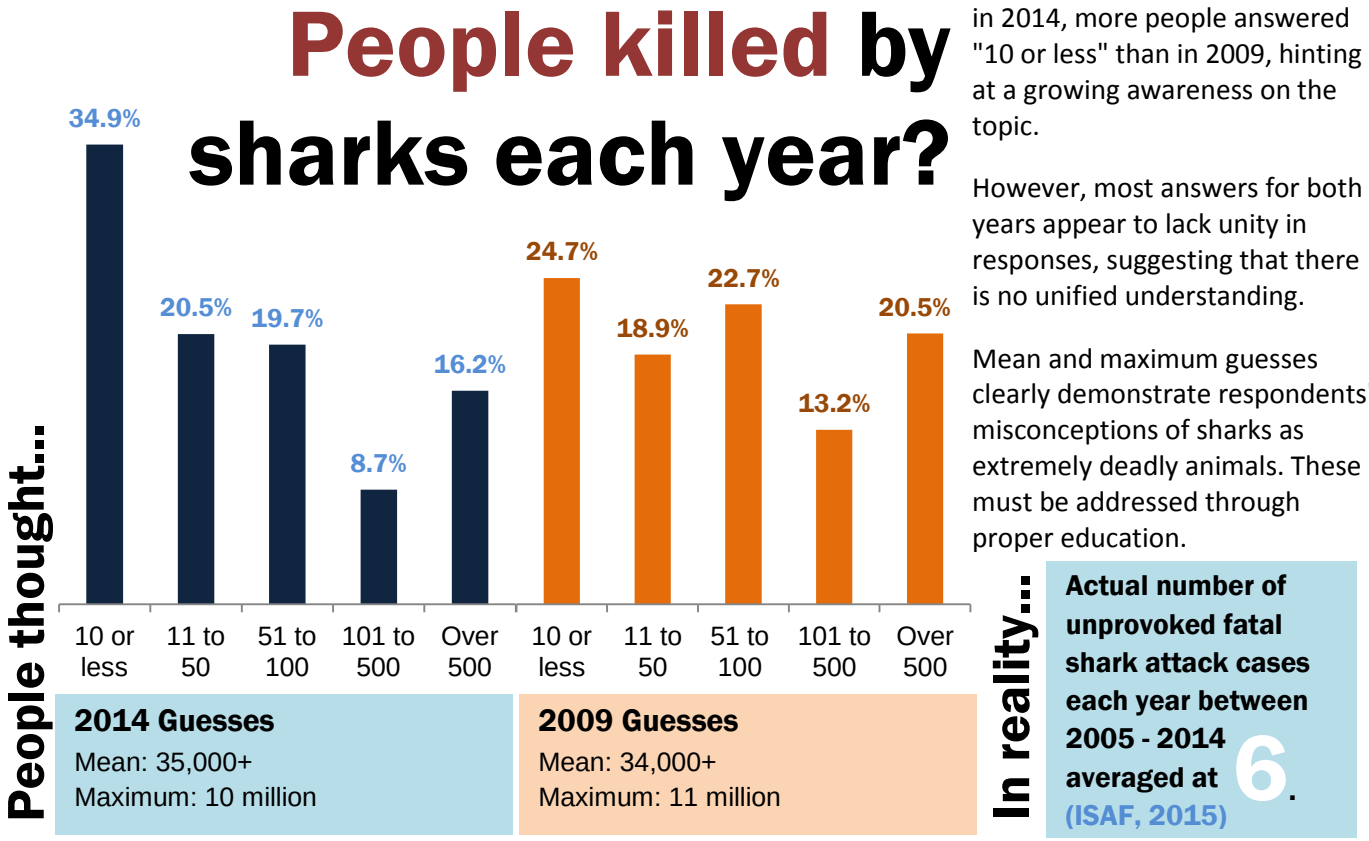


Figure 4.2a - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: Perceived number of people killed by sharks on average each year.

Grossly overestimated, but in 2014, more people answered "10 or less" than in 2009, hinting at a growing awareness on the topic.

However, most answers for both years appear to lack unity in responses, suggesting that there is no unified understanding.

Mean and maximum guesses clearly demonstrate respondents' misconceptions of sharks as extremely deadly animals. These must be addressed through proper education.

Grossly underestimated, and while maximum guesses reach far beyond scientific estimates, the mean value remained far below.

Combining the results for both questions in both years, it appears that Hong Kong people continue to hold misguided opinions about sharks as violent and dangerous to humans, yet fail to properly account for the *extent* of impact that human demand for sharks has had on shark survival. However, a greater percentage of people seem to be approaching correct answers in 2014 — a positive change that must be encouraged through continued education and awareness-raising.

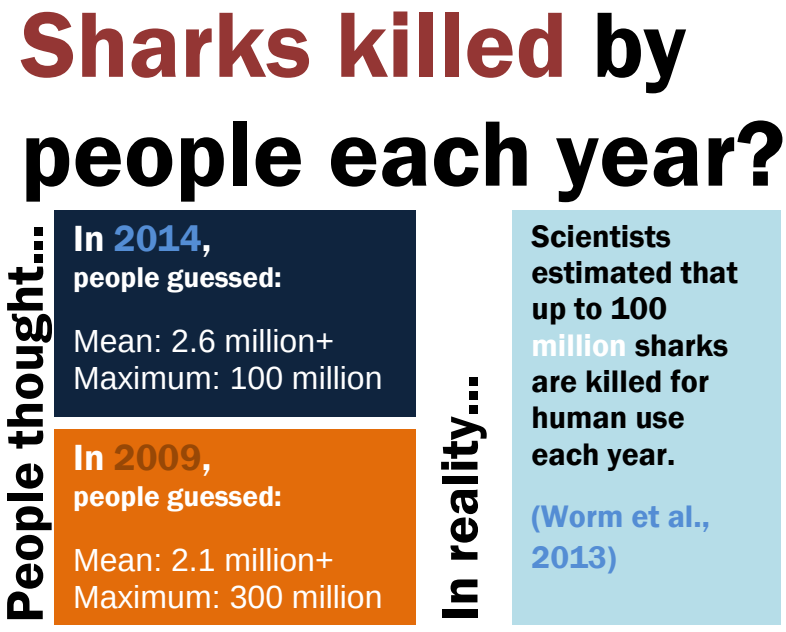


Figure 4.2b - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: Perceived number of sharks killed by people each year

V. CHANGE IS IN THE AIR

1. Awareness for human impact on shark survival is on the rise

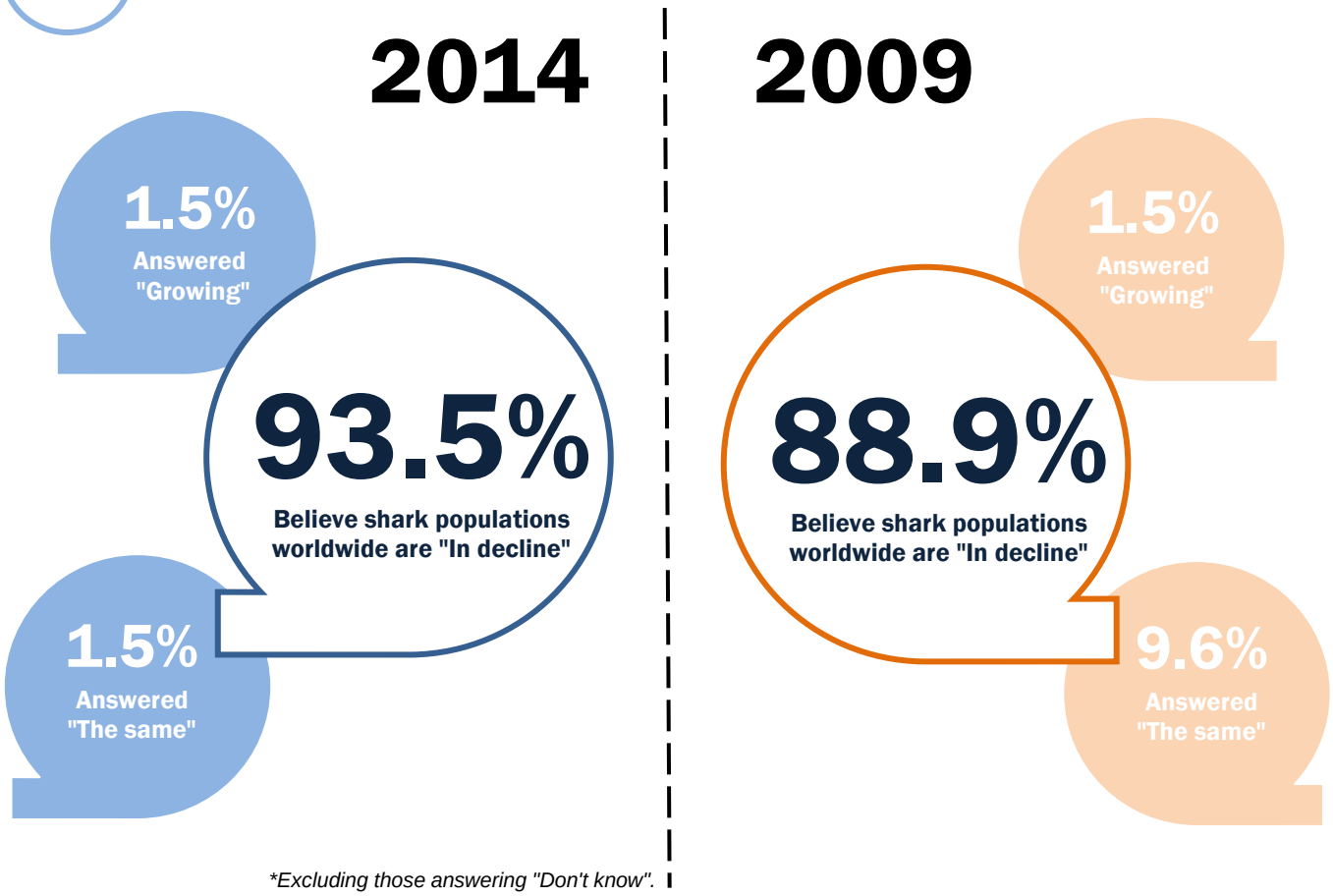


Figure 5.1 - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: Perceived population status of shark populations worldwide

Percentage of respondents who believed that shark populations worldwide are in decline grew from 88.9% in 2009 to 93.5% in 2014.

On the other hand, respondents who thought that the population status of sharks "stayed the same" fell from 9.6% to 1.5%.

These results imply a growing awareness among Hong Kong people for the vulnerability of global wild shark populations and their struggle to survive. However, as demonstrated in section IV.2 (page 18), the scale of how quickly shark populations are declining may not be as widely understood.

Who knows?

Currently, there are no published global studies about the population status and health of shark stocks across all shark species. For the work of shark conservation, this knowledge gap is problematic, as global shark health cannot be directly monitored. Presently, we may only rely on various clues, such as trends in catch sizes and specific species fishery catch data to reflect the abundance of sharks in the wild.

Research efforts to survey regional and local shark stocks must continue, and continue to grow, so as to provide at least pieces of the picture. Combined, these regional studies will be crucial to minimize existing knowledge gaps on the health of global shark stocks.

2. The majority increasingly feel discomfort in knowingly eating endangered fish and threatened species

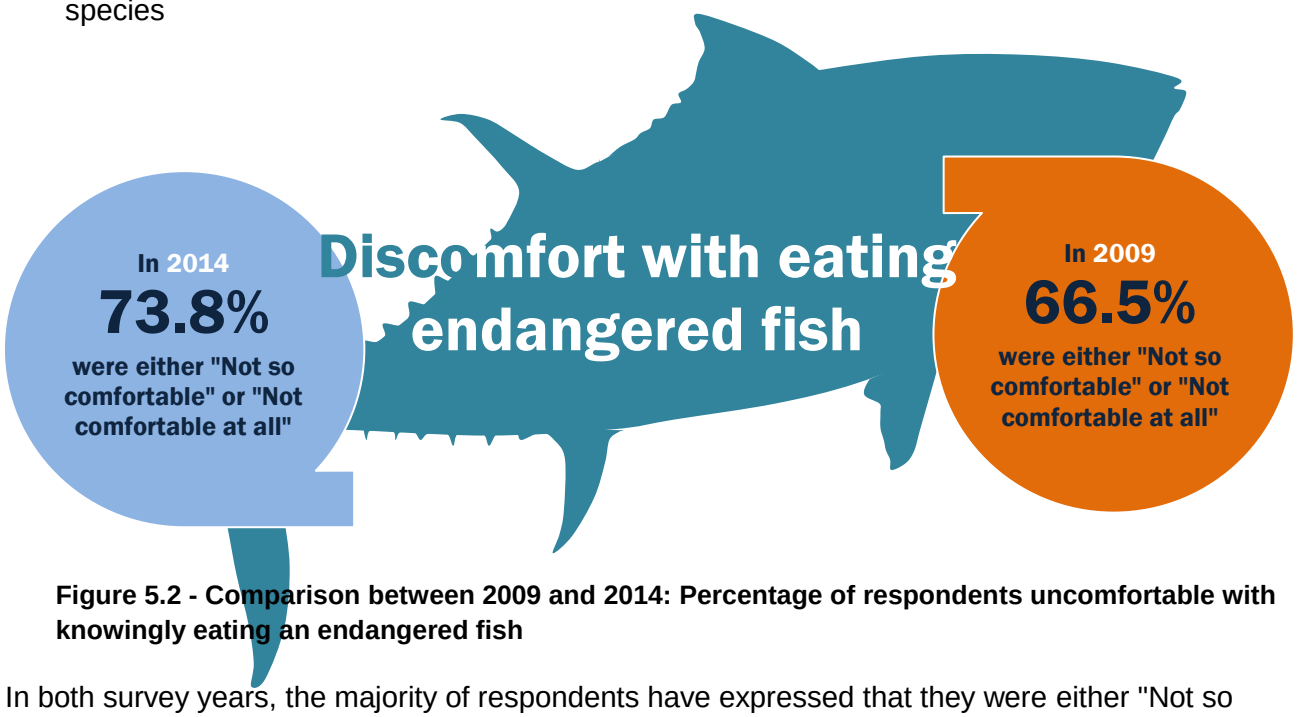


Figure 5.2 - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: Percentage of respondents uncomfortable with knowingly eating an endangered fish

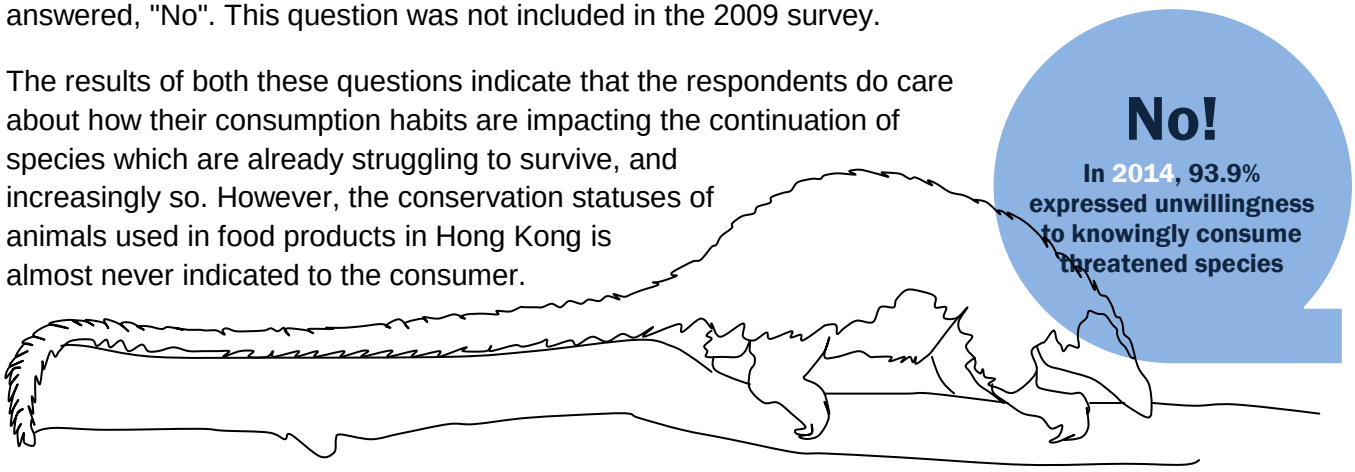
In both survey years, the majority of respondents have expressed that they were either "Not so comfortable" (44.5% 2014; 38.9% 2009) or "Not comfortable at all" (29.3% in 2014; 27.6% in 2009) with eating endangered fish.

Notably, the combined percentage of people feeling either "Very comfortable" or "A little comfortable" had also increased from 3.6% in 2009 to 4.3% in 2014. This was due largely to a slight increase in the number of people that felt "A little comfortable" with eating endangered fish (3.0% in 2014; 2.1% in 2009), as the percentage feeling "Very comfortable" had fallen (1.3% in 2014; 1.5% in 2009). The percentage of respondents feeling neutral had also fallen from 29.9% in 2009 to 22.0% in 2014.

Discomfort with eating threatened species

In addition to this question, respondents were also asked in 2014 about their willingness to consume threatened species (whether plant or animal) knowingly. Up to 93.9% of respondents answered, "No". This question was not included in the 2009 survey.

The results of both these questions indicate that the respondents do care about how their consumption habits are impacting the continuation of species which are already struggling to survive, and increasingly so. However, the conservation statuses of animals used in food products in Hong Kong is almost never indicated to the consumer.



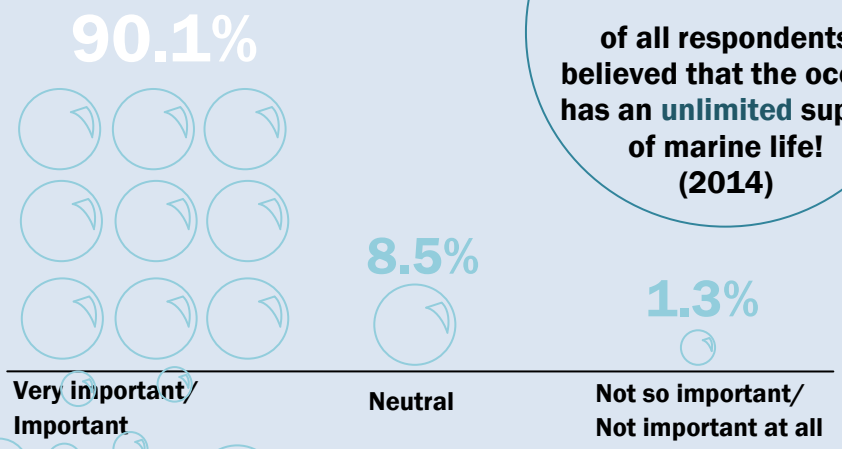
HOW IMPORTANT ARE HEALTHY OCEANS TO YOU?

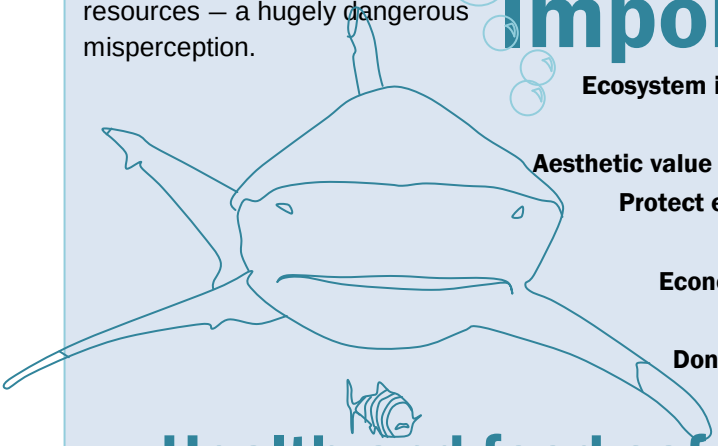
In 2014, respondents were asked how much "healthy oceans" held a personal importance to them. In total, 90.1% of the respondents expressed that it was either "Very important" (65.8%) or "Quite important" (24.3%) to them. When asked for the reasons why, 70.5% of those respondents expressed that "Ecosystem interconnectedness" was a reason. The option of "Food Source" came second by a wide margin, at 25.7%. Other reasons were relevant for only less than 10% of the respondents, with the exception of "Don't know/hard to say" (11.3%).

However, 25% believed that the ocean provided an unlimited supply of resources – a hugely dangerous misperception.

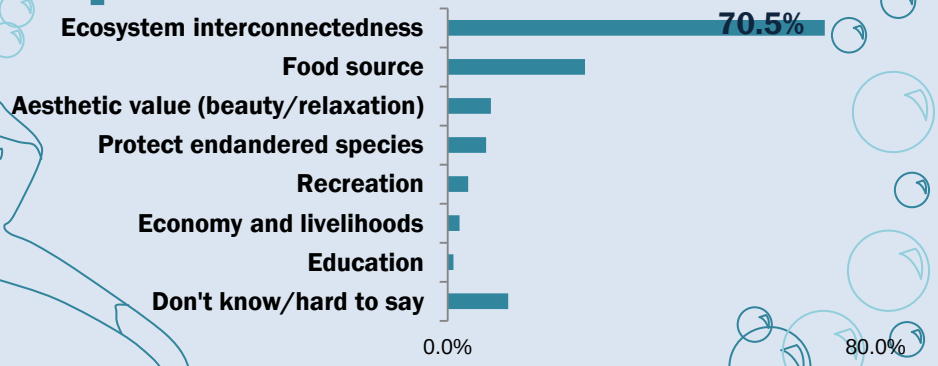
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of all respondents believed that the ocean has an unlimited supply of marine life! (2014)

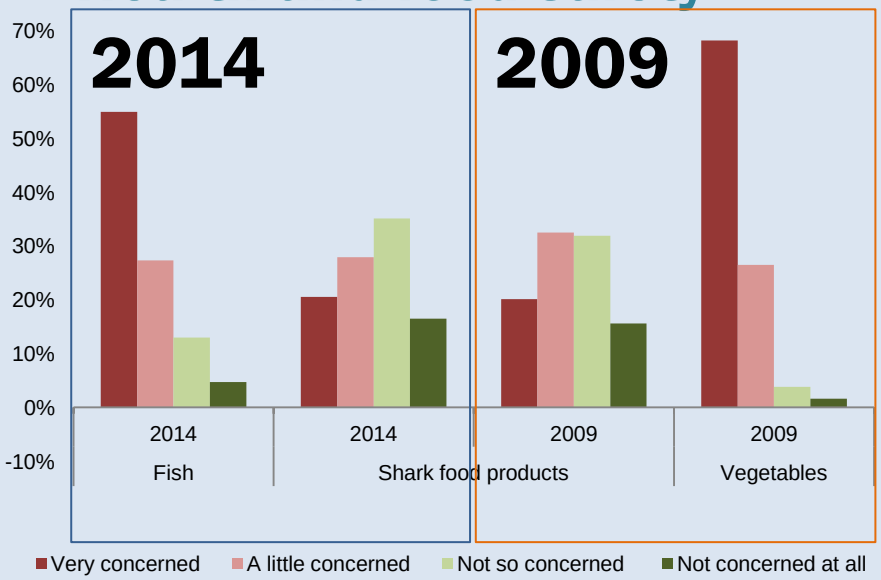




Important because...?



Health and food safety



In both years, respondents were asked about their concern for toxic materials being present in shark-related food products as compared to other food products popular in the news at the time of the surveys (toxicity in vegetables due to chemical pollutants in 2009, and malachite green poisoning in fish in 2014). Degree of concern for toxic materials being present in shark products in both years was relatively variable.

3. Almost everyone agrees that some of the shark fin sold in Hong Kong belong to shark species threatened with extinction (2014 only)

The majority of the respondents showed awareness that some of the shark fins sold in Hong Kong were associated with species that are threatened with extinction.

Nonetheless, 7.6% of the respondents did not believe that shark fins sold in Hong Kong had any association with shark species threatened with extinction.

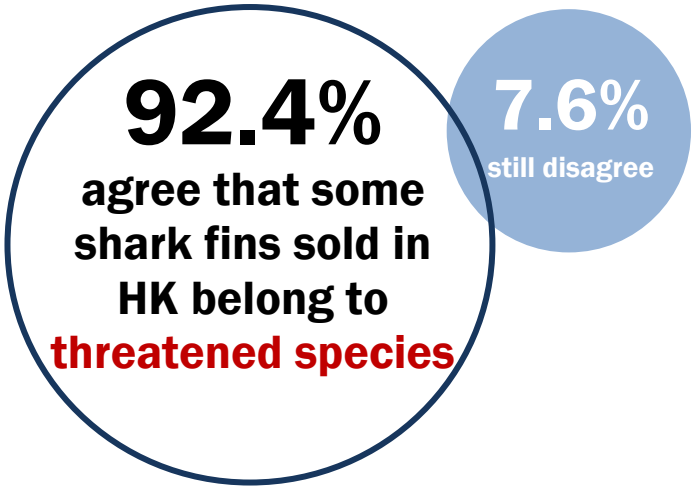


Figure 5.3 - 2014: Agreement that some shark fins sold in Hong Kong belong to sharks that are threatened with extinction

4. Which animal respondents felt faced a more imminent risk of extinction: bluefin tuna, humphead wrasse, pandas, or some species of sharks? (2014 only)

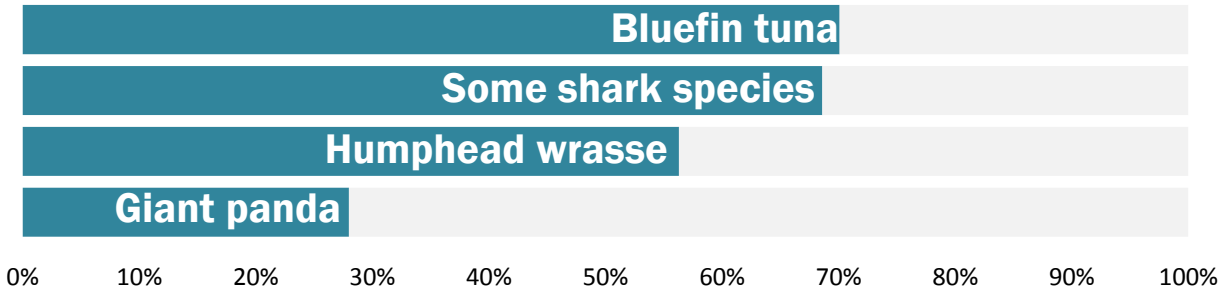


Figure 5.4 - 2014: Comparison of which animal(s) respondents felt faced a more imminent risk of extinction

In the 2014 survey, respondents were asked to rate whether each of the four animals quoted above faced "high", "medium", "low" or "negligible" risks of becoming extinct in the next 100 years. Bluefin tuna was voted as having "High" risk by 70.1% of respondents, and "some shark species" came a close second, as elected by 68.6% of the respondents. Humphead wrasse came third, but still thought to face "High" risks by 56.3%. Pandas, however, came last with 28.0% voting it as having "High" risk, but even more -- "38.6%" --saying that it had "Low" or "Negligible" risks.

Previous campaigns in Hong Kong conducted by various NGOs on the vulnerability of bluefin tunas may have contributed to this present awareness for the species among respondents. On the other hand, the risk for pandas are seen as, surprisingly, quite low, possibly due to the extensive conservation efforts that have been expended on this National Animal for many years. Observing this gap, the need for greater attention to be paid to the conservation of marine resources is reinforced.

VI. SUPPORT FOR HK GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

1. Over 90% show support for the HK government's decision to exclude dishes using shark fin and bluefin tuna in all official banquets for environmental and sustainability reasons (2014)

In 2014, respondents were asked whether or not they supported the Hong Kong government's decision made in 2013 to remove all dishes using shark fin, bluefin tuna and black moss from their official banquets, for sustainability reasons.

Up to 92.7% of the respondents applauded the action as either "Very acceptable" (53.4%) or "Acceptable" (39.3%).



Figure 6.1 - 2014: Support for HK government excluding shark fin, bluefin tuna dishes and black moss in official banquets

2. The Hong Kong government was voted the **most important stakeholder for shark protection** by respondents, with others following closely behind (2014 only)

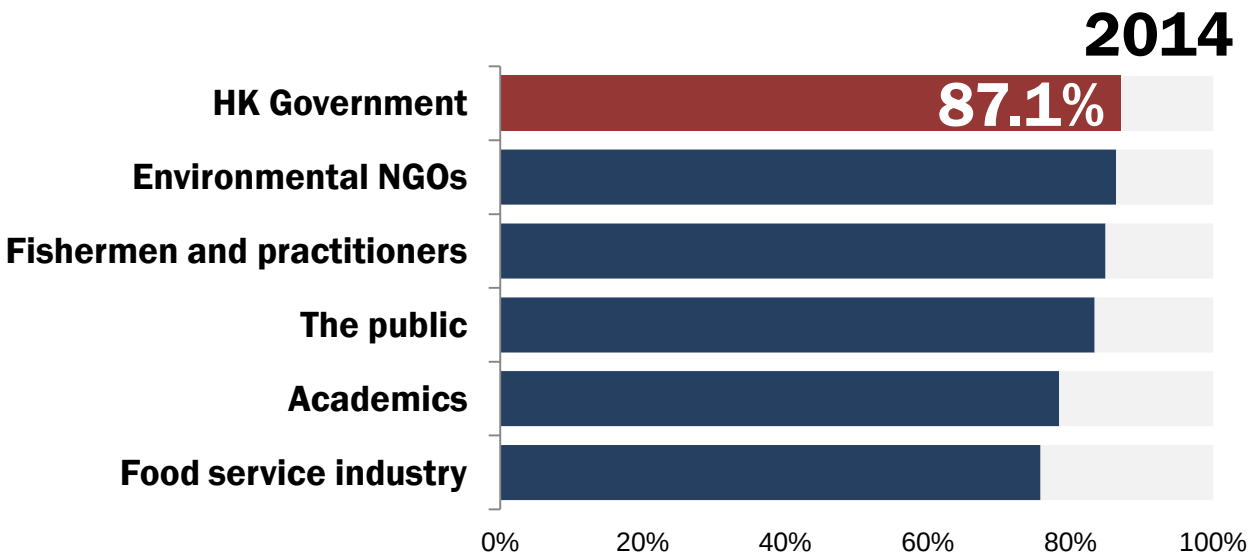


Figure 6.2 - 2014: Thoughts on the relative importance of different stakeholders for shark protection

It is evident that respondents considered all of the suggested stakeholders as having a role to play in shark protection. Notably, the Hong Kong government received the highest vote, where 87.1% of respondents thought that they were either "Very important" (57.4%) or "Quite important" (29.8%).

The message is clear. Each person, regardless of how one may be a stakeholder to shark conservation issues, has a responsibility to do their part for the protection of sharks. However, more importantly, **the government's role as a leader to engage all stakeholders is irreplaceable**.

3. Given that only **a few out of 500** shark and ray species are currently regulated in the international trade, over 90% of respondents are in support of the HK government doing more to help (2014 only)

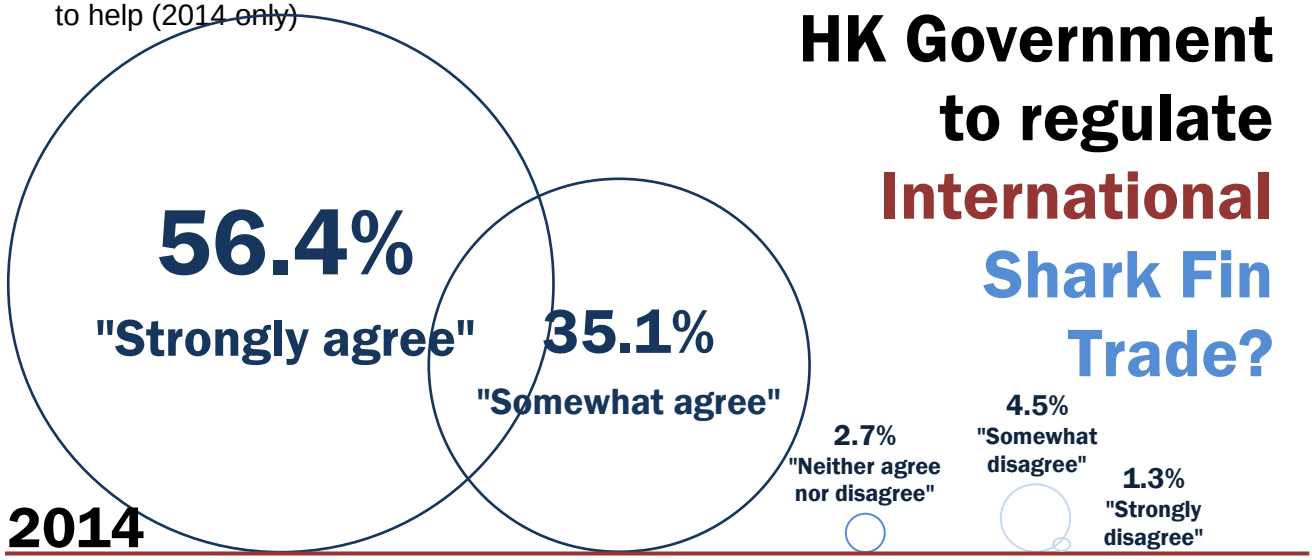


Figure 6.3 - 2014: Support for HK government to spend more effort in regulating the sale of shark fin in the international trade

In 2014, respondents were further asked whether or not they thought the Hong Kong government should do more to regulate the international shark fin trade from the local trade. To provide context, respondents were told that only a few out of the over 500 species of sharks and rays currently enjoy protection under international regulations.

Expressed support for the Hong Kong government to do more reached 91.5% (56.4% "Strongly agree; 35.1% "Somewhat agree). Only 4.5% of respondents "Somewhat disagree", and an even smaller proportion, 1.3%, "Strongly disagree".

4. Consistently, **about nine out of ten** respondents feel that the Hong Kong government should prohibit the sale of products that involve killing endangered species

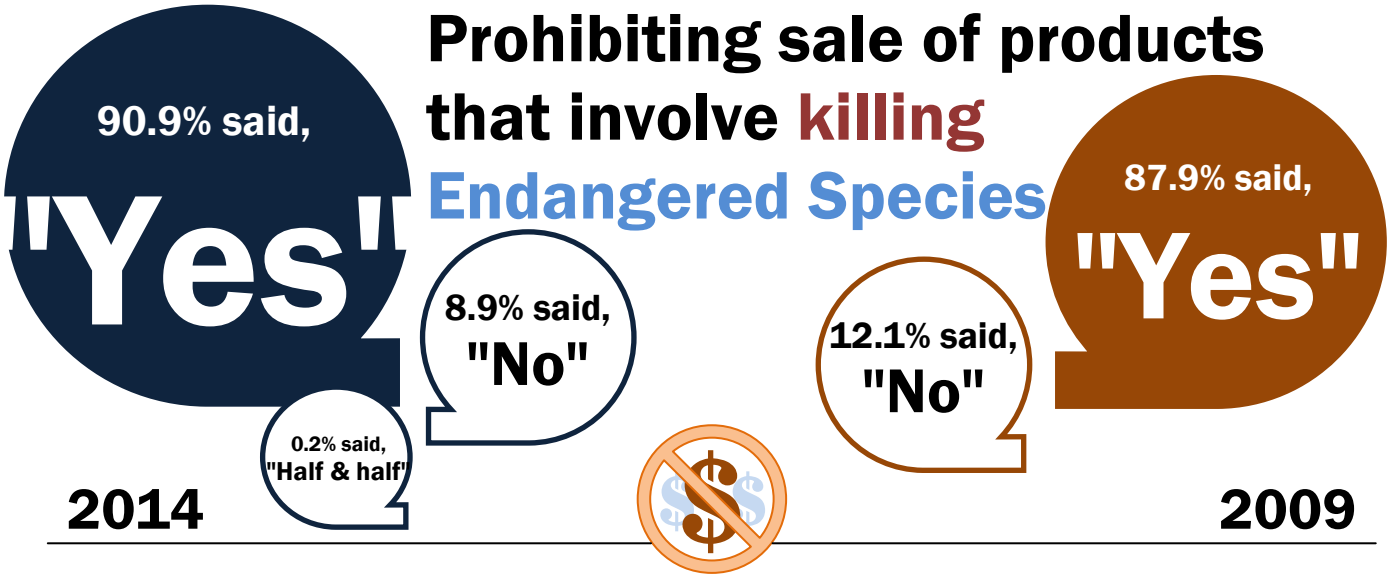


Figure 6.4 - Comparison between 2009 and 2014: Support for HK government to prohibit sales of products involving deaths of endangered species

In both years, the majority of respondents showed support for the Hong Kong government to prohibit the sales of products that involve killing endangered species of plants and animals. Percentage of supporters rose from 87.9% in 2009 to 90.9%. In 2014, respondents were given a further option of "Half and half", which was not present in 2009, although the percentage of respondents opting for this category were relatively low, at only 0.2%.

5. The majority agrees that the Hong Kong government can do more to better protect sharks in a variety of ways (2014 only)

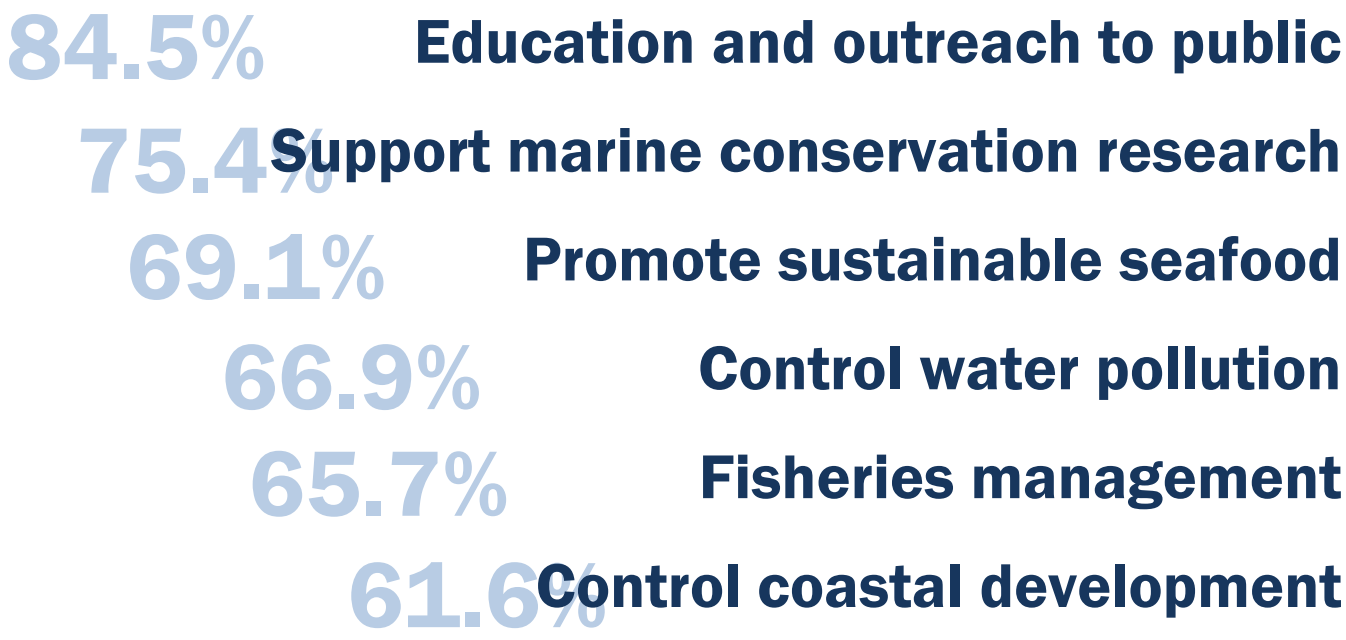


Figure 6.5 - 2014: Suggestions for ways that the HK government may help to better protect sharks

Six options were clearly preferred as actions that the government might take to better protect sharks. These are "Education and outreach to the public (84.5%), "Support marine conservation research (75.4%), "Promote sustainable seafood" (69.1%), "Control water pollution" (66.9%), "Fisheries management" (65.7%) and "Control coastal development" (61.6%). All other options were each chosen by less than 5% of respondents.

Interestingly, 1% of respondents reckoned that the "Government can do nothing", and 0.7% thought that there was "No other effort needed," as the government was "already doing well".

This question was not included in the 2009 survey.

IMPLICATIONS

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

FOLLOW UP FROM 2009

The **2009 survey** delivered a baseline study of Hong Kong people's attitudes and behaviours in the consumption of shark fin and shark-related products. The survey concluded that for Hong Kong people, shark fin consumption held a **social significance** – the necessity of having a social context for shark fin and related products (excluding products where traces of shark meat may be found in negligible amounts, such as in some fishballs) to be consumed.

Some key findings of the **2009 survey** included:

- Frequency of consumption for shark products other than shark fin soup was relatively low
- Shark fin soup is almost always consumed at a restaurant, and very rarely at home
- Shark fin soup is most popularly consumed in wedding and birthday banquets
- However, it is almost always consumed as a part of a set menu, and rarely ordered as a separate dish
- Most respondents chose to keep eating shark fin soup because it was a tradition, and almost the same percentage of respondent said it was because of the dish's tastiness
- Social status was clearly an *unimportant* factor in the decision to continue eating shark fin soup
- The majority of respondents welcomed the use of substitutes to shark fin soup at weddings

All of these results held true and were reinforced by the results of the 2014 survey.

HK People have grown more ready for and are perhaps even actively supportive of a real change in the way shark fin is consumed.

READY FOR CHANGE

In addition to the points above, results of the **2014 survey** suggests that, since 2009, Hong Kong people have grown more ready for and are perhaps even actively supportive of a real change in the way that shark fin is consumed and traded in Hong Kong, as evident from the reasons explained below.

While the relative importance of shark fin consumption to other common shark products (such as shark cartilage etc.) remained similar, the percentage of respondents reportedly having consumed shark fin soup in the 12 months leading up to the survey showed a significant decrease. A greater percentage of respondents had expressed having decreased their consumption of shark fin soup since 2009, and more than 1 out of every 7 respondents will have stopped eating shark fin soup completely.

In reasons for decreasing and for stopping the consumption of shark fin soup, "environmental" concerns were clearly prioritized, over even "cost" — contrary to Hong Kong's reputation for poor environmental awareness and prioritizing material gain over environmental concerns. It was once assumed that the most effective way of reducing consumption was if shark fins became more expensive to buy. However, this

finding suggests that, while cost may still be an important factor in changing consumption levels, Hong Kong's willingness and ability to alter attitudes and behaviour due to environmental reasons, whether on shark consumption or other environmental issues, should be reevaluated.

Adding to this readiness for a steer toward more environmentally aware consumer behaviours and attitudes, 90.9% of respondents in the 2014 survey agreed that the Hong Kong government should prohibit the sale of products that involve deaths of endangered species, regardless of animal or plant (increasing from 87.9% in 2009). Furthermore, 91.5% would like to see the Hong Kong government do more to regulate the international shark fin trade, given that currently only a few out of 500 shark species worldwide are given production under international regulations.

91.5% would like to see the HK government do more to regulate the international shark fin trade

In the five years between the 2009 and 2014 survey, it is evident that the momentum in the support for shark conservation efforts in Hong Kong was not only preserved, but strengthened. Presented with the timely opportunity to make a real, significant change in the way that Hong Kong's use of shark fin and related products are affecting the survival of wild shark populations worldwide, **three** courses of action are presented below to move the city further along the journey of shark conservation.

Action #1: Support Policy Updates

The 2014 survey has found that over 80% of respondents felt that the Hong Kong government was one of the most important stakeholders in the work of shark protection. **High support is shown for initiatives that the government has already taken so far for shark conservation, namely removing shark fin (also bluefin tuna and black moss) dishes from all official banquets.** With the explicit support of the people, it is time for the Hong Kong government to take the next step forward.

Perhaps the most crucial next step to be undertaken by the Hong Kong government is the reformation of the policies and legislation surrounding the local trade in shark fin and shark-related products.

Hong Kong's shark fin trade comes under the scrutiny of international regulations such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), in which species threatened with extinction and/or exploited in commercial trades are listed to provide extra protection from excessive trade. However, the local capacity to monitor and enforce prosecution for law-breakers in the shark fin trade remains restricted to seizures at port. Once illegal

shipments successfully enter Hong Kong, whether via unmonitored routes or bypassing customs inspections, prosecution becomes extremely challenging under the existing legal framework.

Previous studies by multiple individuals and organizations have detailed important paths Hong Kong must take to fortify enforcement (Whitfort et al., 2013; ADMCF, 2015).

Once illegal shipments successfully enter HK, prosecution becomes extremely challenging under the existing legal framework

The following are some of the points listed out by previous research and also endorsed here by BLOOM HK:

- ✓ Demand for greater **traceability** for shark fin-related products being imported into Hong Kong, meaning traders must indicate the full trade route of each shark fin.
- ✓ **Species** of sharks and rays involved in each shark fin cargo must also be declared.
- ✓ Increase **customs officers' capacity** to identify CITES-listed species in shark fin shipments through systematic training.
- ✓ Set **heavier penalties** for violations of regulations, such as when imported CITES species are not properly declared.
- ✓ Establish **designated landing ports** for all cargos with products involving CITES-listed species, including shark fin-related products, for efficiency in carrying out inspections.
- ✓ Impose declaration policies for all shark fin retailers to properly document the amount and category of shark fin-related products **stockpiled**.
- ✓ Gather a **Wildlife Crime Investigation Team** which brings together the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and Customs & Excise Department (CED) of the Hong Kong government to delegate ample resources for the investigation and prosecution of illegal import and sale of not only shark fin, but also other protected wildlife and associated products.

Action #2: Ecology and Biodiversity Education for All

In the 2009 survey, almost half of the respondents reportedly found sharks “scary/threatening”. The estimated number of people killed by sharks on average each year was also overestimated by over 70% of respondents in 2009, and about 65% in 2014. At the same time, the number of sharks being killed by humans on average each year to support the shark fin trade is consistently grossly underestimated.

A small yet still significant percentage of respondents in both survey years held mistaken beliefs about sharks’ ability to survive the harvest of their fins – either they thought that sharks can survive shark finning, or that the fins can " grow back" after being cut off. The 2009 survey also showed that less than 10% of

respondents had learned about the practice of shark finning in schools.

These findings come to indicate not only the need for education on basic knowledge surrounding sharks, but, more broadly, the need for *normalizing* education on the relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world.

These findings indicate the need for normalizing education on the relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world.

As humans, we take from nature the resources we need to fulfill our daily needs and desires without questioning the impact that we leave behind. Our lifestyles are segregated from the natural world on the superficial level, making it difficult for the majority to recognize the many ways that we are interacting with and impacting nature each day.

Perhaps most problematic is the discovery that 25% of all the respondents surveyed in 2014 thought that the ocean holds an *infinite supply* of marine resources. **This is a dangerously mistaken assumption**, removing completely the urgency of the problem of overconsumption and leading one to consume without considering the dire ecological repercussions.

Ecosystems, ecology and biodiversity topics should be included into the school curriculums, with focus on human-nature relationships

Sharks and marine related-resources are only one part of a far larger problem, which is the persisting ignorance of the ways that human actions play out on the non-human world.

For these reasons, the study of ecosystems, ecology and biodiversity topics should be included into school curriculums, with focus on the relationships between human and nature. By offering these topics as fundamental subjects comparable to mathematics, sciences, or language, the knowledge that is now common among so few can be normalized. Individuals will be able to make an informed decision on how to live, whether as consumers, policy-makers, retailers of natural resources or otherwise.

Action #3: Inform Consumer Choice

With reference to action #2 as outlined above, what is found lacking is not the willingness to embrace the conservation of sharks and endangered species, but the knowledge of how to do so, and the ability to identify products that are derived from threatened or endangered species.

The 2014 survey reveals: 92.4% of respondents are already aware that some of the sharks sold as shark fin in Hong Kong belong to species threatened with extinction. However, identification of these problematic fins is impossible for the regular consumer – species information is mostly absent at the dried

seafood retail stores, and definitely absent on restaurant menus.

Furthermore, 7.6% of respondents are still *unaware* that some of Hong Kong's shark fins belong to threatened species. This means that for these respondents, even if they are unwilling to consume threatened fish species, they would not find a problem with consuming shark fin because they are *unaware* that some shark fins in Hong Kong do belong to threatened species of sharks.

THE PROBLEM DOES NOT END AT SHARKS.

Again, the problem does not end at sharks. Other food items voted by respondents as considerable substitutes to shark fin soup at banquets also involve species that are facing threats of extinction and/or suffering from overconsumption. These include bêche-de-mer (sea cucumber), fish maw, and Chinese caterpillar fungus. Abalone, which is also often consumed at banquets and gatherings but not mentioned in this survey, is also facing the same challenges of sustainable use and overexploitation.

The humphead wrasse, deliberately included in the 2014 survey, is another example of an endangered species that is exploited in Hong Kong's trade.

Only retailers are in a position to provide information on which products involve endangered species, and which do not

Consumers may be ready and motivated to make a change in abandoning consumption of endangered species, but only the retailers are in a position to provide information on which products may involve endangered species, and which products do not.

Here, we are brought back to the importance of policy and legislation. Ensuring the traceability of shark fins imported into Hong Kong and mandating clear labeling of shark species and their corresponding conservation status is fundamental in providing consumers with a real, informed choice.

The same can be said for all the other products mentioned above, which are used as food items and popularly consumed in Hong Kong. Where sustainable options may exist, they are invisible and currently indistinguishable from those that involve endangered species. As a result consumers are unknowingly contributing to the species' advance towards extinction.

The clear advantage in Hong Kong's current position is the readiness of the public. This readiness must be supported and encouraged by the government taking the lead to empower consumers as knowledgeable decision-makers, and letting the Hong Kong people fully understand what exactly they are consuming.

CONCLUSION

From long ago we swam around
as guardians of the sea

We strive to keep the ocean clean
by eating out the weak

But you cut our fins, toss us back,
and we sink to the deep.

Lyrics from "Voice",
Written by Cuckoopella, 2015

Hong Kong is ready for a real change in the way that shark fin soup is traded, sold and consumed. Both attitudes and behaviours show that shark fin soup is no longer considered a staple of celebration banquets for the vast majority, and greater conservation efforts are wanted.

With the voiced support for the local government to better protect sharks, the scene is set for Hong Kong to take the next step in regulating the shark fin trade.

As one of the world's greatest trading hubs of shark fin, Hong Kong is in a position to make a lasting difference on the way that shark fin is traded in the international scene.

Several suggestions have been made in the "Implications" chapter on how Hong Kong can vastly enhance their ability to contribute to global shark conservation efforts. Success for shark fin and related products will also set a motivating example for the many other products that are traded through Hong Kong, and that are problematic to sustainability and the environment.

More than 9 out of 10 respondents have expressed their discomfort in knowingly consuming threatened species, and 7 out of 10 are uncomfortable with eating species of fish that are endangered. However, it is often very difficult for consumers to be able to identify from what they consume, whether or not the product contains threatened and endangered species. This is where regulations must come in to help provide information and a sustainable choice for consumers to make.

The key message here is **sustainability**. Shark fin soup may be a core value of the Chinese banqueting culture. In both years, respondents have indicated that the reason they continue to consume shark fin soup is because they felt it was an important tradition. To preserve this tradition is also to preserve the abundance of sharks in the ocean. When every last shark has been slaughtered, the tradition is also extirpated. Likewise, there may be many different reasons for why different people may enjoy consuming products that involve other controversial species, yet to ensure that continued consumption is possible, we must also ensure the species' sustainability.

Hong Kong has arrived at an opportunity for change. The people's readiness to embrace the conservation of sharks and threatened and endangered species must be grasped before the momentum is lost. There is no better time than now to move forward, and transform Hong Kong's role in the international trade from the exploiters to the solution.

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