

# California's Proposed Shark Fin Ban Gets Political

by [Taylor Leake](#) · May 10, 2011

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If you think the environment is the major issue when it comes to the [proposed ban on the possession and sale of shark fins](#) in California, think again. Sure, the point of the ban is to stop the cruel practice of shark finning, where fishermen cut off the fins and tails of living sharks and throw them back into the sea to die. And yes, shark finning is decimating shark populations, killing nearly 73 million sharks every year and causing declines of 90 percent in some species. The loss of a top predator like sharks could wreak havoc on ocean ecosystems, according to experts. But the bigger issue in this particular proposed ban is culture and politics.

You see, shark fins are a main ingredient in shark fin soup, a Chinese delicacy and status symbol dating back to the Ming Dynasty. The dish is often served by wealthy Chinese at weddings and banquets. That has led some to claim that banning shark fins in California is [tantamount to an attack on Chinese culture](#). That doesn't go over so well in California, which boasts a large Chinese-American population, including 50,000 Chinese immigrant voters in San Francisco alone. And that's where the politics comes in.

The shark fin ban has become a hot issue in the [San Francisco Mayoral race](#). Three of the eight candidates in the race are Chinese-American, and they have to balance the cultural heritage of shark fins with the environmental concerns shark fin soup brings up. [One candidate, Leland Yee](#), claims that the ban is an "attack on Asian culture."

But there are many in the Chinese-American (and Chinese-Canadian) community who don't see it that way. The other two Chinese-American candidates in the San Francisco Mayoral race, David Chiu and Phil Ting, have come out in support of the ban. The Asian Pacific American Ocean Harmony Alliance (APA) has [started a petition right here on Change.org supporting the ban of shark fins in California](#), explaining that "thousands of years of Asian philosophy emphasizes the importance of harmony between nature and humanity. Therefore it is imperative for Asian Pacific Americans concerned about protecting the Earth's natural resources to speak up in support of the ban on shark fin." Yao Ming, the Chinese-born basketball star, has also campaigned for the ban, and up in Vancouver, the [Shark Truth campaign](#) is working to stem the shark fin soup tradition.

You can stand with the folks of the APA and fight to end the cruel practice of shark finning by [signing this petition](#). You can also sign [this petition](#) calling on Leland Yee and the rest of the San Francisco Mayoral candidates to support the shark fin ban.

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