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Shark fin losing its lustre among young couples

Once a must at Chinese weddings, the luxury item is losing favour

BY MEDHA, VANCOUVER SUN JULY 10, 2011

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Yvonna Tsang of the Beijing Trading Co Ltd speaks as environmentalist Anthony Marr launches a campaign to ban shark fins in Vancouver, BC., on July 9, 2011.

Photograph by: NICK PROCAYLO, PNG

Young couples are turning away from serving shark fin soup at their weddings as a campaign against the sale and consumption of shark fins gains ground, says the founder of a group fighting use of the product.

"It has been a slow process but the younger generation is embracing the change — now it has become rather unstylish to serve the shark fin soup at weddings," said Claudia Li, whose Shark Truth has been part of grassroots efforts to stop shark fin use within the Chinese-Canadian community

She was commenting as community organizations and activists came together in Vancouver's Chinatown Saturday morning in support of banning the sale and consumption of shark fins.

Yvonna Tsang, the owner of Beijing Trading Company, a shop in Vancouver's Chinatown that still stocks the delicacy, said she has seen demand go down in the past few years and is

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considering not stocking the product any longer.

The younger generation is far more aware, she said, admitting that she herself wasn't aware of the harm caused by use of the fins until she saw the documentary Sharkwater on television.

Shark fin soup has been served as a delicacy for centuries in China and elsewhere. A status symbol, it is often served at wedding banquets.

The huge global demand has led to a worldwide decline in shark populations.

"The removal of the top predator from the oceans is bound to have serious consequences," said Anthony Marr, a Chinese-Canadian animal rights activist who is campaigning for the ban. He has previously been involved in campaigns leading to the ban of products containing tiger bone, bear bile and rhino horns.

Shark Truth's Li said she supports the idea of a ban, but cultural sensitivity is needed in addressing the issue. "Most vendors dealing in shark fins here in Chinatown are low- and middle-income operators," she said. "We need to work at making the community aware rather than antagonizing them. That only burns bridges."

Her group has been involved in an innovative project that asks young couples to publicly pledge that they will not serve shark fin soup at their wedding banquet and offers them a chance to win a honeymoon trip.

The project has been hugely successful, said Li.

Bans help, but working at a grassroots level is the best way forward, said Mike McDermid, of Ocean Wise, a Vancouver Aquarium conservation initiative, in a phone interview. "As demand goes down, so does the incentive for stocking and trading in the product."

Recently, Brantford, Ont. became the first municipality in Canada to ban possession, sale and consumption of shark fins.

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