

MP pushes to ban import of shark fins

BY EVA COHEN, COQUITLAM NOW SEPTEMBER 21, 2011

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Up to 75 million sharks are killed each year, with the majority used toward the shark fin trade,

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New Westminster-Coquitlam MP Fin Donnelly is proposing legislation to stop the illegal importation of shark fins.

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according to Wild Aid Canada.

Fin Donnelly, MP for New Westminster-Coquitlam, and Fisheries and Oceans critic, is proposing legislation in Canada to stop the illegal importation of shark fins to the country.

"Top predators are important in terms of balancing the global marine ecosystem, and when I learned that shark deaths were up to 75 million and the bulk of those are by shark finning, I was shocked," said Donnelly. "I started to investigate and talk to some conservation organizations to find out more about this. It's already illegal to fin sharks in Canada, but the problem lies outside of Canada and that the fins can still be imported."

Donnelly pointed to a recent report to the United Nations on the state of the world's oceans that said the ecosystem is heading toward a sixth extinction period, and the only difference from the previous extinctions, he said, is humans are the cause of the deaths of the top predators.

The bill will be presented in early November, and Donnelly said from now until then he is hoping to meet with as many individuals and groups as possible to get input and feedback on the issue. He said he and his advisors have met with the Toronto-Chinese business association in a preliminary meeting, and they have arranged to go back and talk to more members in Toronto on Sept. 30 for a further consultation.

"One of their concerns was the local jurisdictions passing bans, which means laws would vary from municipality to municipality. A national ban would level the playing field," he said.

Donnelly said he is also interested in doing a round table in the Vancouver area with people from the Chinese business community.

Coquitlam Chinese business associations were contacted but did not return calls on the subject by the time this article went to print.

"If there are concerns about how this will affect a business or a store, I want to get feedback

from owners," Donnelly said. "What we have found, though, is that most people are supporting this move, even within the Chinese community. Many young Chinese couples are making pledges to not serve shark fin soup at their wedding.

"There is a trend away from serving it at weddings, at least on the West Coast."

There are two things Donnelly said can be done to lessen the effect that lack of shark fins will have on a business. First, there are local Canadian shark fisheries where other shark parts can be bought to get the same taste in the food products, and second, shark alternatives can be used for a similar soup or dish.

There are a couple of events coming up in the Lower Mainland that Donnelly said will be pretty fun, and help spread awareness on the issue of shark finning. An organization called SharkTruth (www.sharktruth.ca) will be holding a competition in Vancouver some time in October where Donnelly said high-profile judges from the local Chinese community will honour whoever creates the best alternative to shark fin soup.

In addition, Donnelly said plans are in the works to have a showing of Shark Water, a documentary by filmmaker Rob Stewart, in which his "love for sharks prompts him to undertake a dangerous journey in an effort to save sharks from extinction."

The event will probably be in Port Moody, said Donnelly, but that hasn't been confirmed yet.



"We would like to have Rob Stewart attend and say a few words on the film, so we are working on that," said Donnelly. "It will for sure be in the riding, and we will have all the details hammered out soon."

The overall reaction to the proposed ban so far has been very positive, said Donnelly.

"So far, people who have known about finning are horrified it's still going on, and people who don't know, if you give them a 30-second overview of stats and figures, are shocked and very supportive."

editorial@thenownews.com

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