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# Shark fins off the menu in California — is Toronto next?

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**Alyshah Hasham**  
Staff Reporter

The fate of Toronto's proposed ban on selling or consuming shark fins will be decided in committee on Thursday, but a similar ban is now law in California — one of the largest consumers of shark fins in North America.

The controversial bill, signed last week by Gov. Jerry Brown, has been called discriminatory to Asian culture and cuisine by opponents because the bill focuses on the shark fin rather than the whole shark.

However, supporters of the bill — including Chinese basketball star Yao Ming and actor-activist Leonardo DiCaprio — say the ban is needed to protect dangerously declining shark populations. Conservation groups estimate more than 73 million sharks are killed for their fins a year.

It's hoped the ban will decrease the practice of "finning" — cutting off just the fins and leaving the shark to bleed to death in the water.

The valuable fins (worth about \$600 a pound) are used in shark fin soup, a Chinese wedding tradition.

Getting the bill passed was the fruit of "a long and hard fight for conservationists in California," says Claudia Li, founder of the Canadian conservation non-profit Shark Truth. She believes the momentum will carry over into Thursday vote at Toronto's licensing and standards committee.

Shark Truth has more than 2,600 people signed on to an [online campaign](#) supporting the ban. About 10,000 signatures overall from online and paper petitions have been collected, said Joanna Hui, an assistant to Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker, who proposed the ban to

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council. A similar campaign in California got nearly 28,000 people signed up.

However, [city staff](#) are asking council to push Ottawa for a federal ban on shark fin imports rather than put in a city-wide ban.

The Toronto Chinese Business Association has also come out in favour of a national ban over a Toronto one, saying it would be unfair to restaurants competing with those in cities such as Markham where there is no ban.

Li disagrees. "[Like California] everyone looks at Toronto for leadership. It's another huge economy," she said.

A ban in Toronto could pave the way for a federal ban, she said.

*With files from Star wires and Star staff*

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