

To Council for Sustainable Development,

## **Recommendations to the Council of Sustainable Development on sustainable consumption of biological resources**

HK Shark Foundation appreciates the effort from Council of Sustainable Development (SDC) and we share the same view; there is an urgent need to promote sustainable consumption of biological resources in Hong Kong, and believe that only with concerted efforts from all sectors of society can we make a fundamental change.

Shark fin is a typical biological resource that is consumed in Hong Kong. It has also been cited by the SDC as an example on such issues. Despite import data and social studies indicating that shark fin consumption is in decline, Hong Kong remains the biggest trade hub in the world, handling over 50% of international shark fin trade. Hong Kong imported around 5.5 million kg shark fin in 2015, showing the importance of our city in global shark conservation.

### **Current efforts are far from enough in HK**

In the SDC's public engagement document, it also mentions that many corporations have made pledges to "Say No to Shark Fin," and a number of hotels have stopped selling shark fin, or are promoting alternatives. However, HK Shark Foundation research from early 2016 still found shark fin soup on 98% of menus in Chinese restaurants, indicating that shark fin is still popular in Hong Kong. Moreover, shark fin should have been excluded from menus at official receptions from Government guideline since 2013, but our latest research demonstrates that not all public organisations are following the guideline.

### **Prioritising biological resources based on the global relevance and importance**

We believe endangered and threatened species should have the priority to get the proper attention before it is too late. Biological resources consumption is a very broad topic which is related to almost everything in our daily life.

Hong Kong plays an incredibly important role in the trade of endangered and threatened wildlife species, heavily influenced by the historical and cultural background of the city. Demand for wildlife comes from Chinese cultural values, as many species are prized as culinary delicacies, and in traditional Chinese medicines. Hong Kong is a well established trade hub for many endangered and threatened species. We believe that prioritising particular species as they are traded through Hong Kong will have a global impact. It is important for Hong Kong to demonstrate its commitment to being a responsible global city.

As mentioned above, shark fin trade in Hong Kong is crucial to global shark conservation. There are more than one third of oceanic sharks are at risk of extinction. Sharks should definitely be included on the biological resources priority list.

### **Transparency and information is key**

The current data and information on the consumption on biological resources are very limited. Taking shark fin, for example, the government collects import and export data, but neglects details that specify the species. Further, there is no publically available shark fin consumption data. It is extremely important to have gather and share the correct data, in order for Hong Kong to develop a strategy to reduce local consumption, or even to simply understand changing trend and the effectiveness of public campaigns.

From a consumer perspective, the lack of transparency and basic information on shark fin products presents a major barrier for conscientious consumers striving to make a responsible, sustainable decisions. At present, there are no labelling or information requirements, even for Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) regulated species. Providing clear information and requiring that basic information, including origin of the product and the scientific name of the species, would help consumers to better understand what kinds of biological resources they are consuming, and how their choices may be affecting biodiversity.

### **Policy not guideline**

The government, industry and consumers should establish targets to significantly reduce, and eventually stop the consumption of endangered and threatened species. The government should have clear policies, not simply guidelines, on procurement to ensure the highest standard and adopt global best practices. The government should also provide incentives for those in industry to adopt government policy, and improve the sustainability of their products.

Based on the failed attempts to promote no shark fin commitment in society, it is clear that we need stronger measures to push for reform. Guidelines with no binding clauses will likely to be ignored, and thereby fail to create changes. Urgent action is needed.

### **Addressing cultural concerns**

Hong Kong possesses a uniquely diverse culture, of which traditional Chinese culture remains integral and highly influential. Accordingly, it plays an important role in consumption practices in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, some Chinese traditions have greatly impacted biological resources, with shark fin being among many products harvested unsustainably from endangered species as Chinese medicine.

Specific and targeted communication strategies are needed to address the cultural concerns, especially of senior citizens, who are usually more connected to, and therefore influenced, by their heritage.