

DOLPHIN HUNTING AND SHARK FISHING IN PERU – FACT SHEET

The illegal killing of dolphins and juvenile sharks in Peru puts entire marine ecosystems at risk

The Southeast Pacific Ocean off the coast of Peru is one of the most biodiverse spots on the planet. The waters off the 3,000 km long coastline of Peru are abundant with marine life and yield 10% of the global fish catch. A land of plenty, also for marine predators like dolphins and sharks. Peruvian waters are home to about 31 marine mammal species. However, every year up to 15,000 dolphins are estimated to be killed by the Peruvian longline shark fishing fleet to use their meat as shark bait. A considerable amount of the dolphin meat is also sold illegally on Peruvian markets for human consumption.

In a second devastating massacre, around 1.2 million sharks are brutally killed every year in Peru. Almost 90% of the sharks caught are juveniles.

These practices are not only banned by national law but also critically endanger Peru's marine ecosystem as a whole. Therefore, OceanCare is calling for this illegal slaughter of dolphins and juvenile sharks to end and for the laws and regulations to be rigorously implemented, controlled and enforced.

Illegal killing of dolphins

Most commonly targeted species

- Dusky dolphin *Lagenorhynchus obscurus*
- Long-beaked common dolphin *Delphinus Capensis*
- Short-beaked common dolphin *Delphinus delphis*
- Common bottlenose dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*
- Burmeister's porpoise *Phocoena spinipinnis*



Laws and regulations in place

- *Law N° 26585 (1996)*
 - ➔ Prohibits the extraction of small cetaceans, the processing of their meat and its commercialisation
 - ➔ Sanctioned with 4 years of prison time
- *Supreme decree N° 002-96-PE (1996)*
 - ➔ Prohibits consumption of dolphin meat
 - ➔ Dolphins caught alive in nets have to be returned to the sea alive
 - ➔ Prohibits the landing of dead dolphins or their parts for human consumption
- *Supreme decree N° 021-16-PE (2016)*
 - ➔ Prohibits the use of "animal harpoons" aboard fishing boats



In the years prior to the ban on dolphin extraction (1996) between 15-20,000 dolphins were estimated to be killed annually in Peruvian waters^[1]. **However, the introduction of the ban has had no significant impact on the killing of dolphins^[2]**. While the number of officially recorded killings initially decreased due to hampered monitoring and new concealed harvesting methods, Peruvian fishermen have continued to hunt dolphins for shark bait and human consumption. That way, a large black market has been created where cetacean meat is still openly sold^[3].

If not caught in fishing nets by the gillnet fishery (as both by-catch and as a result of active hunting), members of the Peruvian longline shark fishing fleet, on the other hand, usually harpoon dolphins at close range and let them bleed out in the water. Once devitalised, the animal is pulled aboard and beaten to death, although other killing practices such as throat-slitting or suffocating by stuffing plastic bags into the blowholes have also been reported^[1]. Regularly, fishermen cut up the harpooned dolphins directly at sea. On one hand, this allows for their meat to be immediately used as shark (and sometimes also for ray and turtle) bait, providing a cheap alternative to common bait such as anchovy, mackerel and other fresh fish, which has to be purchased. On the other hand, the dissected parts of a dolphin are more easily landed than an entire carcass in order to avoid getting caught. Thus, the killing of dolphins in Peru continues on high levels and on a regular basis despite prohibiting legislation^[4]. Studies have proven that the main reason for this continuation is the lack of legal enforcement by Peruvian authorities both at sea and at land^[2].

Up to 15,000 dolphins are illegally killed

In terms of numbers, long-term research by OceanCare's Peruvian partner organisation Mundo Azul has revealed that between 5,000 and **15,000 dolphins are still being killed in Peruvian waters every year**. This results from the following calculation: the longline shark fishing fleet in Peru consists of around 500 registered boats. On average, each boat goes out on 10 fishing trips annually. The usual catch rate of dolphins is between 1 and 3 individuals per trip. Thus, the annual number of catches is estimated to vary between 5,000 and 15,000 dolphins. However, the actual size of the shark fishing fleet including unregistered boats is difficult to estimate, but likely two to three times larger than official numbers indicate.

As a result, dolphins do not only die a painful death, but also see their population stocks at grave risk. For the dusky dolphin *Lagenorhynchus obscurus* off Peru, direct harvest has been shown to be the single greatest threat and has occurred at levels far exceeding sustainability^[5]. It is therefore high time that conservation measures, as laid out in Law N°26585, are now rigorously enforced.

Illegal killing of juvenile sharks

Most commonly targeted species by longline shark fishing fleet

- Shortfin mako shark *Isurus oxyrinchus*
- Blue shark *Prionace glauca*



Laws and regulations in place

- Supreme decree N°012-01-PE (2001)
 - ➔ Minimum landing size for shortfin mako sharks of 170cm
 - ➔ Minimum landing size for blue sharks of 160cm
- Supreme decree N°002-14 PE (2014)
 - ➔ National Plan for Action Conservation and Management of sharks
- Supreme decree N°021-16-PE (2016)
 - ➔ Requires sharks to be landed as a whole to avoid finning



Minimum landing sizes for sharks are crucial to ensure sustainable reproduction of their populations. However, the regulations in place in Peru are almost completely ignored. A recent study observing Peruvian shark fisheries during five years concluded that **83.7% of sharks caught were deemed sexually immature and under the minimum landing size^[6]**.

Here again, governmental regulations fail to grip. One major reason for this is that a large share of Peruvian shark fishermen is not aware of the minimum landing sizes, as studies have shown^[7]. Another reason is, again, that the Peruvian government provides no adequate mechanism to enforce the regulations^[8]. As a result, fishermen who are aware of the regulations have admitted that they still retain sharks under the minimum size of capture^[7]. Moreover, the government's efforts to curb shark finning, though welcome, does not address the issue adequately, as sharks are generally landed as a whole in Peru for their meat and not their fins.

Shark fishing in Peru is a growing industry. Every year, an estimated 1.2 million sharks are caught in Peruvian waters alone^[6]. While shark meat is predominantly sold on domestic markets, export numbers have significantly risen, tripling between 2000 and 2005^[7]. The international trade of shark fins, although less important than meat, has also increasingly occurred in recent times^[9]. The extent of shark fishing in Peru is alarming. Both the shortfin mako and blue shark have already been listed as species of conservation concern on the IUCN Red List. Besides enforcing the regulations in place, introducing a seasonal hunting ban on both species is overdue in order for their gravely overfished stocks to recover.

Marine ecosystems of Peru at risk

The illegal killing of dolphins and capturing of juvenile sharks pose a severe threat to the marine ecosystem of Peru, which already suffers from immense pressure. In fact, domestic fishing activity is relatively small compared to the majority of fishing grounds sold to foreign companies, notably from Southeast Asia, through fishing permits and licences. Overall, the catch rates of both domestic and foreign fisheries in Peru have declined in the past years, underlining their unsustainable conduct^[10]. The high scale of industrial fishing in Peru has, for instance, also lead to anchovy stocks to be severely overfished. The anchovy fishery in Peru is the world's largest fishery focussed solely on one fish species.

Although artisanal anchovy fishery is supposed to be directed towards local consumption, about 98% of its catch is channelled towards the more lucrative fish meal and fish oil industry, which exports its produce worldwide to feed fish in fish farms and livestock on land. Moreover, the share of juvenile anchovies caught has dramatically increased in the past years, with estimates ranging between 50 and 90% of total catch^[1]. This is another worrying example of Peruvian marine living stocks being rapidly decimated for short-term profits, denying the local population access to food, harming marine ecosystem vitality, and potentially depriving future generations of Peruvians of the unparalleled biodiversity that harbours the Southeast Pacific Ocean.

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