



# Sharks and Rays Factsheet: Why Switzerland Needs an Import Ban

## Why Sharks and Rays Matter

Sharks and rays are ocean guardians that have thrived for **450 million years**. With over **1,200 species** (546 sharks, 667 rays), they maintain healthy marine ecosystems by controlling fish populations and distributing nutrients throughout the ocean. Without them, our seas collapse.

## The Crisis: Extinction in Our Lifetime

### The numbers are alarming:

- **37.5% of all shark and ray species** are threatened with extinction
- **59% of reef sharks and rays** face extinction
- **Ocean shark populations have crashed by 71%** since 1970
- **Over 100 million sharks** are killed every year
- Some regional populations have **declined by 95%**

*Primary threats: overfishing, illegal fishing, habitat destruction, climate change, and global trade.*

## The Billion-Dollar Trade

The global shark and ray trade is worth **over \$4 billion annually**:

- Shark meat: **\$2.6 billion**
- Shark fins: **\$1.5 billion**
- Products include meat, fins, cartilage, oils, and cosmetic ingredients

**Europe is a major trading hub**, with Spain and Portugal leading exports.

## Switzerland's Role

Despite being landlocked, Switzerland imports shark and ray products:

- **65 tonnes of shark meat** (2000-2024)
- **5.4 tonnes of shark fins** (2000-2024)
- **87 tonnes of ray meat** (2012-2024)
- **17 tonnes of shark and ray fillets** (2017-2024)
- Most imports come from **EU countries (82%)**

*Note: Actual imports are likely higher due to mislabelling and products containing shark ingredients.*

## Health Risks: A Hidden Danger

**Eating shark meat is dangerous to human health.** As top predators, sharks accumulate toxic pollutants:

- **High methylmercury levels:** Eating shark once weekly delivers **3x the safe methylmercury limit**
- **2025 European study:** Nearly two-thirds of shark meat had alarming methylmercury levels
- **Swiss study (2004):** 20% of tested fish exceeded legal mercury limits
- **Health impacts:** Nervous system damage, kidney damage, fertility problems, harm to unborn babies

**The problem is worse because shark products are often mislabelled** – consumers don't know they're eating contaminated shark meat.



## Current Protection Isn't Enough

### International measures are failing:

- **CITES protection** covers 130+ species, but enforcement is weak
- **Countries underreport trade** by alarming amounts
- **Processed products bypass regulations** – DNA testing is needed to identify species
- **Illegal fishing and mislabelling** continue unchecked

## The Solution: Follow Austria's Lead

**Austria banned shark imports in 2024** – proving it's legally possible under international trade rules.

### Why Switzerland Needs a Complete Import Ban:

- ✓ **Protect consumers** from methylmercury-contaminated products
- ✓ **Stop contributing** to the extinction crisis
- ✓ **Set an example** for marine conservation
- ✓ **Low economic impact** – imports are relatively small
- ✓ **Support biodiversity goals** in Switzerland's Maritime Strategy

**Panama also banned all shark and ray imports in 2024** – Switzerland should follow this comprehensive approach.

## International Progress

### Growing global movement:

- **34 countries** have banned shark finning
- **22 countries** have full or partial shark fishing bans
- **Austria and Panama** lead with complete import bans
- **EU regulations** require "fins naturally attached" policy

## Call to Action

**Switzerland must ban the import of all shark and ray products immediately.**

Just as Switzerland banned seal products in 2017, a shark and ray import ban would:

- **Protect Swiss consumers** from health risks
- **Demonstrate leadership** in marine conservation
- **Support global efforts** to prevent extinctions
- **Align with Switzerland's environmental commitments**

**The science is clear. The health risks are real. The extinction crisis is urgent.**

*It's time for Switzerland to act.*

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## Key Facts Summary:

- 🐋 **37.5% of shark species** face extinction
- ⚡ **71% population decline** since 1970
- 💰 **\$4+ billion** annual global trade
- 🦴 **3x methylmercury overdose** from weekly consumption
- **AT Austria banned imports** in 2024
- **CH Switzerland can act now**