

Sharks are undoubtedly the misunderstood creatures of the deep, prohibiting many swimmers from entering the ocean and some would even prefer a sea without them. However, sharks are vital to our ecosystem and have been around for 450 million years, surviving five mass extinctions. Their greatest threat now are sadly humans. While the cost-of-living crisis has deeply affected people around the globe this year, for sharks it is not so clear cut.

Many Britons are reducing their consumption of fish due to the rise in inflation which is expected to reach 10.7% in 2022. The decrease in demand has resulted in fewer fishing boats setting sail which has to an extent lowered the risk of them becoming collateral damage from fishing lines or hooks. “Overfishing is the biggest threat to sharks...they are already regularly retained as wanted bycatch”, says director of conservation at Shark Trust, Ali Hood. Whilst sharks may have experienced temporary respite in the UK, Hood reiterates that globally “they are already regularly retained as wanted bycatch regardless of the current cost of living impact”. Roughly around 100 million sharks are killed every year, equating to around three per second.

Globally, the cost-of-living crisis may result in an increase in consumption specifically of shark meat. The popular dish, shark fin soup results in many sharks captured, butchered and then cruelly thrown back into the ocean where they drown. Hood says ‘shark meat is already valued as a cheap source of protein in certain countries, beyond the UK, where food security is especially pressing e.g. Brazil has a high rate of consumption of Blue Shark’. If the global inflation rate continues to rise, (predicted at 8.8% in 2022) so will the rate of sharks being consumed. This has disastrous consequences as two-thirds of sharks involved in the fin trade are at risk of extinction.

With fewer beachgoers as a result of less disposable income, sharks have seen a positive impact. There are over one billion sharks in oceans around the globe with only 73 unprovoked attacks in comparison. Sharks are rarely impacted by beachgoers unless in areas where juveniles evolve. Hood points out that “some sheltered beaches

in the Canary Islands are known to be nursery grounds for angel sharks”, while in the UK, there has been a reduction of “interactions of water users with basking sharks”. Therefore Hood argues that a significant reduction of water users results in fewer disturbances.

The shark community globally have experienced small respite from overfishing and human interaction as a result of the cost-of-living crisis however old threats have evolved such as the increase in consumption of shark meat. The future impact of sharks in relation to the global economy, Hood says, is “market value, fishing pressure, and also on funding available to deliver research and conservation”. The ultimate way to help sharks is via education, sharing the importance of sharks and how they are not the mindless killers as portrayed in mainstream media.

Link to accompanying video: [https://youtu.be/ei\\_dRamE0yY](https://youtu.be/ei_dRamE0yY)