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Mississauga bans shark fin products; Details of enforcement still unclear, but bylaw will add 'momentum' to anti-finning movement

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Illustrations: Mississauga has become the largest Canadian city to ban shark fin products. Paul Sakuma/AP file photo

Mississauga councillors unanimously adopted a bylaw Wednesday that bans the possession and sale of shark fin products in the city.

The decision makes Mississauga the largest city in Canada to ban the controversial products, the consumption of which has pushed many of the world's shark species to the brink of extinction.

The move came a day before a Toronto council committee was to address the issue, and following the introduction of a ban in Oakville in July.

At the municipal level, much of the debate revolves around whether cities have the jurisdiction and the ability to enforce such a ban.

Mississauga Councillor Pat Mullin says cities certainly have the jurisdiction but adds there are issues to be worked out regarding enforcement.

George Rust-D'Eye, the city's interim integrity commissioner and an expert on municipal law, is one of the lawyers who have stated recently that municipalities do have the jurisdiction to impose such a ban.

Mullin said it will take a little time to work out the details, but council, eager to give momentum to other cities and higher governments thinking about doing the same, did not want to delay until staff worked out all the kinks. The ban is in effect immediately.

"I hope Toronto, tomorrow, uses Mississauga as an example," she said.

Toronto Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker, who with colleague Kristyn Wong-Tam has been pushing for a local fin ban, said Wednesday the Mississauga vote strengthens their hand ahead of a vote in the licensing and standards committee meeting Thursday.

"This is great news for us, and for sharks," De Baeremaeker said, adding that the Mississauga vote builds momentum after California last week banned the sale and consumption of shark fins and related products.

"It also undercuts the argument of Toronto restaurant owners who say if we ban it in Toronto people will just go to Mississauga restaurants. They can't say that now. I'm convinced we will get this passed."

If the committee agrees, it will go to full council for final say at the Oct. 24-25 meeting.

A big impetus behind shark-fin bans is the controversial practice of "finning" - cutting off a live shark's fins, then throwing the animal back in the water, where it usually dies. Finning has been described not only as inhumane, but also a serious threat to the ocean ecosystem.

The fins are commonly used for shark fin soup, considered a delicacy and status symbol by many in the Chinese community.

Mullin points out that younger generations of Chinese-Canadians are increasingly opposed to the practice of serving it.

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