

Toronto Star

Help save the sharks

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With sharks facing ruthless extermination, and other cities boldly taking action by banning sale of their fins, Toronto politicians are poised to pass a toothless measure Thursday urging Ottawa to get involved. There's no excuse for such a feeble dodge, especially with Mississauga unanimously adopting an immediate ban this week.

Shark fin soup is a traditional and expensive Chinese delicacy served at special occasions, such as weddings. But in order to harvest fins it's estimated that about 70 million sharks are sacrificed each year - many left to die in the ocean after having their fins cut off.

Staff on Toronto's licensing and standards committee have looked at rules and practices across North America. They've produced a report that concludes there is "no clear municipal purpose" in banning the sale of shark fin products and that a local prohibition would be "highly vulnerable to legal challenge." It recommends that councillors ask Ottawa to forbid the importing of shark fins and derivative products.

Just writing a letter to Ottawa is a feeble response. If that's all this committee can do it will be revealed as nothing more than a remorseless meeting machine. It looms large with a great deal of talk. But when it comes to actually making a difference, it's a minnow.

Mississauga wasn't afraid to take action, as have the cities of Brantford and Oakville. Respected municipal lawyer **George Rust-D'Eye** analyzed the issue and concluded that city council does have the power to prohibit sale of an animal product for human consumption, and such a ban would be supported by the courts. That view was backed up in a separate written opinion signed by 12 other lawyers.

In light of that consensus, and determined action by other municipalities, the committee should vote to ban the sale and possession of shark fin in Canada's largest city. City council should unanimously endorse that measure later this month. Sharks aren't cuddly - far from it - but these sharp-toothed denizens of the deep deserve protection.

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