

# Sabah facing shark extinction — UMS expert

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**KOTA KINABALU:** The Sabah Tourism, Culture and Environment's proposed banning of trade in shark fins should be welcomed and implemented fast, said a researcher in fishermen's socio-economy and Sabah's maritime civilisation.

Assoc Prof Dr Ismail Ali of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) said Sabah's waters were at one time rich in various species of shark including the grey bamboo shark (ikan yu in Malay), but were now facing extinction due to overfishing for their fins, meat and jaw.

Ismail, who is also dean

of UMS' Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, said overfishing of sharks was due to the high demand from hotels and well-known restaurants in the state as many tourists from Hong Kong, Korea, China and Japan enjoyed shark's fin soup.

He said that based on Sabah's maritime history, fishing and trading in sharks existed since the Sulu sultanate in the 18th century.

"Besides meeting the high demand of the China market for shark fins, sharks are also caught to

make salted or dried fish, with Kudat, Sandakan and Semporna being the top producers in the state for these items."

He said in Semporna, for instance, catching sharks for their fins was routine work, while his research found shark fins being dried openly at many of the wet markets in the state.

"Shops proudly display shark fins to attract consumers while shark jaws are also in demand as decorative or display items," he observed.

On the effects of fishing and trading in sharks, Ismail said it should be

curbed as the presence of sharks in Sabah's waters was important for balancing the marine ecosystem and biodiversity.

"If fishing of sharks continues to be rampant, it will give a negative image to the Sabah government which at the same time, is promoting its marine treasures to the world as an attraction."

He said many countries in the west had since a long time ago, banned fishing and trading in sharks as they realised the impact of these activities on the marine ecosystem and on humans themselves. - Bernama