

## Annex II

### Reducing Demand for Wildlife Products: WildAid Campaigns in Asia

Reducing demand for wildlife products can help diminish the scale of the poaching problem while also providing a longer-term prospect of ending trade in a specific wildlife species altogether. Demand reduction can be accomplished by educating consumers and changing their behavior, introducing or enhancing policies and regulations to limit or prohibit trade, and strengthening enforcement of those measures.

Since 2000, the environmental organization WildAid has focused on bringing an end to the illegal wildlife trade by working to reduce consumption of wildlife products. Demand reduction efforts include campaigns to raise awareness and change attitudes and behavior, government outreach to change policies and regulations, and assistance designed to strengthen enforcement.

WildAid campaigns primarily focus on elephant ivory, pangolin, rhino horn, shark fin and tiger, with activities mostly under way in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand and Viet Nam. In collaboration with celebrity ambassadors and using the same techniques as high-end advertisers, WildAid creates aspirational conservation campaigns that are seen by hundreds of millions of people each year.

In recent years, WildAid campaigns have helped to:

- reduce shark fin consumption in mainland China by 50–70%, while decreasing shark fin imports and prices by 80% between 2011 and 2016. A survey conducted in 2016 shows that 93% of respondents in four major Chinese cities had not consumed shark fin in the previous six years;
- increase awareness of and affect attitudes to ivory among more than 50% of respondents in mainland China and influence both public opinion and policymakers on the need for a domestic ivory ban;
- increase awareness of and affect attitudes to rhino horn among more than 70% of respondents in Viet Nam; and
- significantly reduce the consumption of and trade in manta and mobula ray gill rakers in Guangdong province in southern coastal China, coming close to putting an end to a rapidly growing local trade (WildAid, 2017, n.d.).

#### Reducing Demand for Shark Fin in China

Recent economic growth in China has permitted a large group of people to buy luxury goods. China's urban population grew from 20% in 1980 to nearly 60% in 2018, and is predicted to continue rising to 80% by 2050. China has an urban population of approximately 837 million, the majority of whom are classed as upper middle class or affluent (Barton, Chen and Jin, 2013; UN DESA, 2019). The consumption of wildlife products has also grown considerably. It is estimated that the fins from 73 million sharks are used in shark fin soup each year (WildAid, 2016).

Photo: © WildAid

YAO MING  
姚明

JOIN ME, SAY NO TO 與我攜手  
向魚翅說"不" SHARK FIN SOUP.

73,000,000 sharks a year end up in shark fin soup.  
Many are "finned" wasting 95% of the animal.

WWW.WILDAID.ORG

WHEN THE BUYING STOPS, THE KILLING CAN TOO.

WILDAID SHARK SAVERS OCEANA THE HUMANE SOCIETY

When WildAid began its shark fin awareness campaign in 2006, its surveys showed that public knowledge of the problem was negligible:

- 75% of Chinese survey participants were unaware that shark fin soup came from sharks (in fact, the Chinese term for shark fin soup is “fish wing soup”); and
- 19% of Chinese survey participants believed the fins grew back (WildAid, 2018a).

Very few respondents knew about the cruelty of finning and the devastating ecological impact of this trade. WildAid’s premise was that increasing their awareness of the realities of the trade would help change attitudes and behavior.

Instead of playing a direct role in trying to persuade Chinese consumers to reject shark fin, WildAid enlisted dozens of popular, respected celebrities—including actor Jackie Chan and basketball star Yao Ming—to convey the message. With a limited campaign budget of a few hundred thousand dollars per year, the organization could not buy enough airtime to make a difference, so it focused on creating compelling messages that China’s largely government-controlled media would agree to broadcast (WildAid, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2017).

One of WildAid’s biggest campaigns centered around the Beijing Olympics in 2008, where Yao Ming led the Chinese Olympic delegation. The organization also targeted outreach activities at chief executive officers, hotels, restaurants and chefs (WildAid, 2012).

From 2008 to 2012, WildAid organized successful campaign activities with an annual budget of about US\$1 million per year, while leveraging nearly US\$200 million in pro bono media placements and airtime; in 2013 alone, media organizations in China donated approximately US\$164 million in media activities to WildAid. The campaign’s high point was a hard-hitting and widely influential segment on shark fin on Central China Television’s news magazine program (similar to the US show *60 Minutes*). In 2013, as part of an anti-corruption drive, the government banned shark fin from any official banquet functions, sending a strong message to both government officials and the public (WildAid, 2013).

Campaign messages addressed multiple issues related to shark fin, including:

- the massive scale of overfishing and exploitation of sharks (up to 73 million per year);
- cruelty in how sharks are killed;
- various environmental impacts of removing large numbers of sharks from the ocean, including putting many species at risk of extinction and impacts of resulting ecosystem imbalances;
- negative health effects of eating shark fins due to their high levels of heavy metals and toxins;
- the risk of getting fake shark fin but being charged the full price; and
- the risk of ordering shark fin soup made from illegal shark fins.

In a WildAid survey in four major cities in 2013, 85% of respondents said they had stopped eating shark fin soup within the past three years and 65% cited awareness campaigns as a reason for ending their consumption (WildAid, 2014a).

After WildAid launched its shark fin campaign in China in 2006, trader interviews in 2014 and independent survey findings indicated that shark fin consumption in China had fallen by between 50% and 70%. At the September 2016 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Conference of Parties, the China CITES Management Authority corroborated these findings, stating that shark fin consumption in China had declined by 80%, based on information reported in a recent publication from the China Seafood Logistic and Processing Association. Moreover, shark fin imports into China had decreased by 82% between 2011 to 2014, and estimated wholesale shark fin sales in Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai declined by 81% between 2010 and 2014.

Yao Ming’s commercial [PSA] impact single-handedly smashed my business.

—Shark fin trader, Guangzhou (WildAid, 2014a, p. 18)

A 2016 attitudinal survey of residents in Beijing, Chengdu, Guangzhou and Shanghai found that 80% of respondents had seen WildAid’s public service announcements (PSAs) and 98.8% agreed that the messages had

raised their awareness of shark conservation and the need to stop consuming shark fin (WildAid, 2018a). Many restaurateurs have stopped serving shark fin soup, saying that Yao Ming changed their minds.

Business is down by more than half, some restaurants have closed and some chefs have been laid off. Of course I know shark fin is controversial—I learned it from Yao Ming’s PSAs. I feel guilty in my heart, but what else can I do?

—Chen Jun, chef, Lanzhou city (Denyer, 2013)

Revulsion at the practice of finning has been steadily growing since China’s best-known sports star, the basketball player Yao Ming, said on film in 2009 that he would no longer eat the soup. Yao used the slogan “*Mei yu mai mai, jiu mei yu sha hai*,” meaning “when the buying stops, the killing can too.”

Yao’s campaign is said to have helped to reduce consumption of shark fin soup and contributed to the Chinese government’s decision formally to ban the soup from all state banquets (Vidal, 2014).

## Demand Reduction for Other Wildlife Products

Building on the success of the shark fin campaign, in 2012 WildAid launched a massive campaign to reduce ivory demand in China, the world’s largest market, in partnership with Save the Elephants and the African Wildlife Foundation. In the first two years, public awareness of the poaching crisis increased by 50%, and 95% of those polled in 2014 supported banning the ivory trade (WildAid, 2014b). In addition, wholesale ivory prices in mainland China and Hong Kong dropped by as much as 78% between 2014 and 2016, and ivory seized coming into mainland China fell by 80% in 2016. In the greatest single step towards protecting African elephants, in late 2016 China announced that it would shut down its domestic ivory market within the year (WildAid, 2016). The ivory ban was fully implemented by December 31, 2017 (WildAid, 2017).

WildAid’s rhino campaign has helped to raise awareness and reduce demand for rhino horn in China and Viet Nam. Since its peak in 2014, the price of rhino horn has fallen from US\$65,000 to around US\$18,000 per kilogram (WildAid, 2018b). A 2016 campaign survey in Viet Nam showed that just 23% of respondents attributed medicinal effects to rhino horn, compared with 69% in 2014—a 67% decline. Only 9.4% of respondents in 2016 said that rhino horn could cure cancer, down from 34.5% in 2014—a 73% decline. Knowledge that horn is composed of substances found in hair and fingernails increased by 258% in two years, a period during which WildAid ran the high-profile “Nail Biters” campaign featuring billionaire entrepreneur Richard Branson, actress Li Bingbing and more than 30 other prominent celebrities (WildAid, 2015, 2018b).

Separately, WildAid launched campaigns in China and Viet Nam to reduce the demand for pangolins. Over the course of two years, the organization recruited a number of Asian megastars, including martial artist Jackie Chan, singer Jay Chou and actress Angelababy, to raise awareness of the plight of pangolins and encourage the public to shun consumption of their scales and meat. Surveys of Chinese residents found that 97% of respondents stated that the Jackie Chan “Kung Fu Pangolin” PSA made them less likely to buy products made from pangolins (WildAid, 2017).

On a regional scale in Guangdong province in China, another WildAid campaign persuaded residents to cease consumption of manta and mobula ray gill rakers (*peng yu sai*). Roughly two years after launching a localized campaign in 2014, a market investigation found gill plate stocks in Guangzhou had fallen 63% in just under three years. Meanwhile, 79% of participants surveyed in 2016 had seen WildAid’s PSAs and billboards. Sixty-seven percent of respondents who had first been surveyed in 2014 had stopped or reduced their consumption of *peng yu sai* by 2016, many (43%) doing so as a result of WildAid messaging (WildAid, 2016).

## Making Demand Reduction Effective

The objective of demand reduction campaigns is to change behavior by raising awareness—using a variety of approaches and appeals such as “don’t buy” or “stop buying.” In WildAid’s experience, most people change their attitudes and behavior when they learn key facts of which they were not previously aware, such as that animals are killed cruelly or illegally, that the illegal wildlife trade has devastating impacts on species and wild populations, that products are potentially unhealthy or toxic, or that they lack medicinal benefits. Not all individuals who buy or use wildlife products change their attitudes or behavior after direct exposure to campaign messages, however. WildAid anticipates that as awareness raising contributes to the creation of new social norms for the majority in society, users who do not immediately respond to campaign messages will eventually be influenced by those around them.

To be effective, demand reduction campaigns must be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances. It is generally not possible to plan out a campaign or reliably earmark resources for a three- or five-year period, and large funding programs that intend to support demand reduction projects can usefully recognize the need for adaptability. While a campaign needs goals and objectives, the specific series and mix of activities needs to unfold in response to short-term impacts, emerging opportunities and developing information that cannot be foreseen from the outset.

Lessons learned include the following:

- It is impossible to plan an entire campaign at the outset.
- When first phases are executed with vigor, they can serve to build momentum and create opportunities for expanded reach and new phases.
- It is important to find ways to gain attention amidst the busy marketplace.
- Definitive consumer profiles may be misleading. Consumers change as economies evolve. The uses to which wildlife products are put also change over time, often in response to traders' activities.
- Successful campaigns tend to be sustained over time; a one-year plan is not enough.
- The use of a variety of angles to address issues keeps messaging fresh and interesting.
- Perseverance is key to an effective campaign.
- While campaigns benefit from a maximum of empirical information, they also need to continue to adapt.
- By being nimble, flexible and fast to take advantage of opportunities, organizers can intensify and expand campaign momentum and impact.
- Donors and funders can support campaigns by recognizing that they will not necessarily follow linear trajectories and by allowing for step-function progress, with flexibility for adaptation and resourcefulness.

## Acknowledgment

**Contributor:** John Baker, WildAid (<http://wildaid.org/>)