

▾ **SPEAK UP!** :: Letters

## **Unavoidable realities**

I REFER to Khatijah Abdullah's letter on "Busting myths about shark finning" (Oct 3).

Why don't oriental diners give up eating shark's fins and thus avoid the wasteful killing of sharks? This question is not so different from asking why diners, oriental or occidental, pick only choice fish for the table.

A significant proportion of the fishing industry's catch that has no economic value goes to waste. Such trash fish, dead or near death, are commonly thrown back into the sea. If only diners are not so selective in the fish that they eat, more fishes of all varieties – and not just sharks – would be spared.

In the real world, however, consumers choose according to what appeals to them, whether it is shark's fins that they covet or trash fish that they eschew.

How choosy consumers tend to be depend largely on whether they basically eat to live, or live to eat. Among affluent societies where the latter is the norm, it would be an uphill task to change people's eating preferences, some of which are culturally ingrained.

Khatijah does not say if gourmet shark's fins are most commonly obtained from species of sharks that are threatened (not all species are endangered), but this might not be the issue in any case because she finds shark finning cruel. She explains that the de-finned fish suffers as it drowns when it is unable to swim properly to keep the flow of water through its gills.

I have no wish to dispute Khatijah's contention that drowning sharks suffer. But millions of fish suffocate every day when they are hauled from the sea. These include those that reach the market, as well as the remainder that are dumped overboard. I don't know if sharks that suffocate by drowning suffer more than other fish that suffocate on the decks of fishing vessels.

We should of course take heed not to inflict unnecessary suffering on any of earth's creatures. Unfortunately, death of fish by suffocation is an unavoidable reality of the fishing industry.

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