

Conservation Labelling: sharks, squalene and the EU

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EAZA was part of a successful campaign to ensure that all products containing vegetable oil in the EU must, from 2014, designate clearly on their labels what oils or combinations of oils have been used in their manufacture. This campaign was in response to the destructive impacts, predominantly in Southeast Asia, of unsustainable palm oil production. For conservation issues that have their root cause in consumer products, informing the buying public of the impacts of their purchases should be seen as part of the conservation education remit of zoos and aquaria. Such labelling may also benefit from grouping under the new term of '*conservation labelling*' wherein product labelling is in response to clear conservation issues.

Sharks, a much maligned group, are subject to severe pressures and demands from consumers, with a recent report estimating that 100 million, or 1 in 15 sharks, are killed each year (Dalhousie University 2013). Sharks are hunted for their meat, fins, cartilage and also their liver oil. The oil from the liver of deep sea sharks is harvested to be used predominately as an emollient in cosmetic products. This product is called *squalene* and is often labelled on products. However, this is where the confusion arises – squalene can also be produced from vegetable sources, leaving the consumer unaware as to whether the squalene is vegetable or shark derived, if indeed they are aware of what squalene is in the first instance. Current estimates suggest that up to 6 million deep sea sharks are harvested each year to supply the cosmetics industry.

The Zoological Society of London, an EAZA member, has teamed up with a high-end London department store, Selfridges, in the innovative campaign 'Project Ocean'. After the initial success of their 'No more fish in the sea' campaign to encourage consumers to buy only sustainable fish, they are now turning their attention to squalene with Selfridges becoming a shark-free zone, having removed all squalene products from their store. While consumers at Selfridges can now shop with confidence this is not the case elsewhere as EU cosmetic labelling rules do not oblige companies to label whether the squalene in their product is animal or vegetable. This is also the case for the rest of the world. EAZA has recently appointed a full-time staff member to be based in Brussels to focus on EU issues and has contacted a conservation friendly MEP to begin igniting interest in squalene labelling in the Union. Conservation labelling will form a strategic part of the remit of this new EAZA position.

This presentation will discuss the issues described above and set out a suggested plan of action for zoos and aquariums in relation to labelling and shark-derived squalene. It will also be suggested that conservation labelling could be a core campaign area for zoos and aquariums due to their massive global audience.