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to 70 percent of the pre-QMS catch. We have a good idea how many tonnes are caught inshore but much of the deep-water shark catch goes unreported. The total is clearly too much. Even the original 1986 quota was higher than scientists felt was sustainable.

Ironically, the older school sharks are not even safe to eat. Because they live a long time they accumulate large amounts of mercury in their tissues. This mercury is toxic to humans; so toxic that it is not safe for an adult to eat older school sharks more than once every two weeks. And pregnant women and children shouldn't eat them at all.

Yet the killing and selling goes on. This is especially tragic because sharks don't lay hundreds of thousands of eggs per year like finfish. They have a few young every two to three years and that's it. It takes them a decade to reach reproductive age and they live at least 45 years. If shark populations are hit too hard by over-fishing they cannot bounce back in five or ten years.

Now there is even a greater danger to our shark populations. Our fishermen are becoming more aware of the great value of shark fins in Asia. Businesses have developed in New Zealand to process these fins for export. The value of the fins can make it worthwhile to catch the sharks,

take their fins and throw the dying bodies back. This process is called "finning" and has been going on world-wide.

School sharks, unfortunately, are also an unavoidable by-catch of our coastal and offshore trawl fishery. They are also caught in large numbers on long lines that target hapuka and groper. This by-catch of school sharks may well be equal to a safe quota with no allowance left to permit additional target fishing. It's certainly ridiculous to allow commercial fishermen to selectively catch additional large numbers of pregnant, mature females in the Parengarenga and harbours like it. Harbour fishing for sharks clearly must stop.

To inhibit the development of a black market in fins the sale of shark fins by fishermen should be made illegal as well. All fins should be passed on by wholesalers after the bodies are processed and all sharks landed with fins attached.

THE PURE WHITE silica sand dunes of Parengarenga Harbour have attracted more than the tourist's eye over the years. Once every month a tug and two barges leave Auckland to mine the sand for the ACI New Zealand Glass Manufacturers Company.

Three thousand tonnes of the sand is

pumped into each barge as a slurry and deposited on the deck. As the water runs back into the sea it carries with it the smaller sand particles. Most of this material settles out but some is carried into the harbour and deposited around the Shell Banks and Dog Island. At the same time there seems to be a growing defect in the foreshore of the Kokota Spit, where the sand is mined.

Measurements of the dunes over the sixty years the mining has been going on reveal no definitive trend but because the dunes are constantly moving no one can be sure that the hundreds of thousands of tonnes that have been removed are being naturally replaced.

The Maori argue that the spit is being eroded, that fine sand is being deposited inside the harbour, and that if the spit is breached because of the erosion the harbour's interior would be forever altered.

But can it be stopped? ACI is the last glass making industry in New Zealand and already recycles more than a third of all the used glass in this country. Coloured glass can be most easily made from recycled material but clear glass requires a higher percentage of pure ingredients – the sort of uncontaminated silica sand found at Parengarenga.

ACI's lease on the Parengarenga dunes is due to expire in 2011. At that time a