



EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE FORUM

STOP FINNING – STOP THE TRADE



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1

The Initiative: 'Stop Finning – Stop the Trade'



'Stop Finning – Stop the Trade' is the eighth successful European citizens' initiative (ECI). It calls on the Commission to end the trading of loose shark fins in the EU by extending Regulation (EU) No 605/2013 which bans shark finning, and to also ban the import, export and transit of loose shark fins into, from and within the European Union.

The 'Stop Finning – Stop the Trade' initiative was registered on 2 January 2020 and its signature collection period started on 31 January 2020. It succeeded in gathering **1 119 996 verified signatures of support** and the **minimum thresholds were reached in 15 Member States**. The collection period was extended by 1 year to 31 January 2022 to allow for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the campaign¹.

After the signature collection phase ended, the initiative went through the verification process (also extended due to the pandemic), during which the statements of support were checked and validated by the responsible authorities in each Member State. The initiative was then formally submitted to the European Commission on 11 January 2023 ([Press Announcement](#)). The Commission published a communication replying to this initiative on 5 July 2023.



Success factors

- Developing a strong partnership with various organisations;
- Building a supporters network before starting the initiative;
- Constantly networking and expanding partnerships with other organisations throughout the campaign;
- Focusing on the use of social media to reach a larger audience and new target groups;
- Establishing volunteer teams in different EU countries to assist in developing and maintaining local campaigns.



¹ In line with Regulation (EU) 2020/1042, Decision C(2020) 9226 and Decision C(2021) 1121.

2

The Campaign

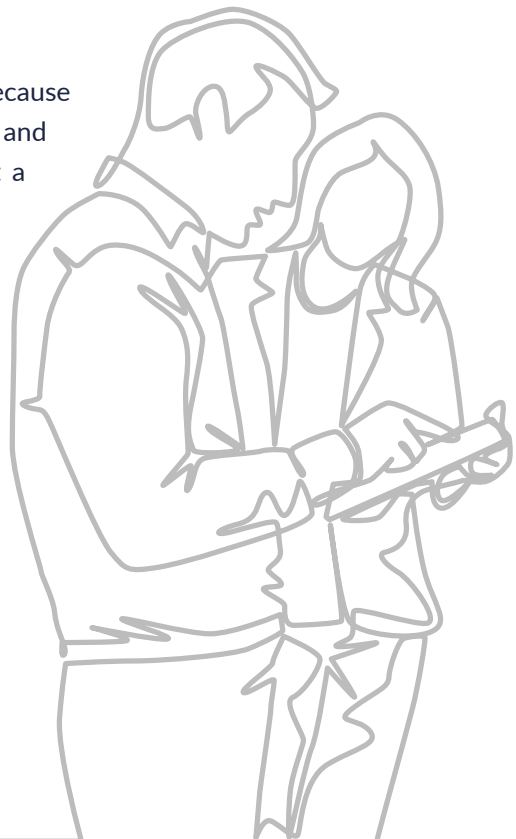
Preparation

The organisers of 'Stop Finning – Stop the Trade' were, like other organisers of ECIs, very passionate about their topic and were ready to hit the ground running. The preparation of an ECI is arguably the most important part. During the preparation phase, organisers develop their campaign strategy and build their network. Building a **network of partners and volunteers** was essential to the success of this ECI. This initiative had the support of 105 organisations, 14 water sport associations, 14 companies and 16 celebrities / influential people. The main supporter was the Sea Shepherd NGO, which provided the organisers with financial support, campaigning expertise and advice.

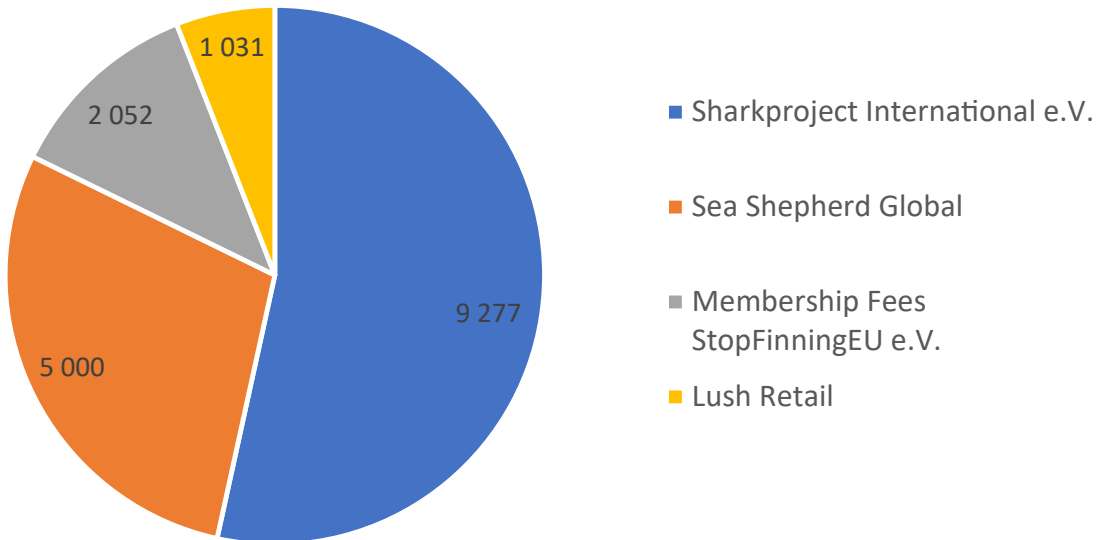
Ensuring that these networks of partners actively supported the initiative was a challenge. The organisers overcame this by initiating online conference calls to keep the partners updated on the progress of the initiative; establishing a regular newsletter; creating content for the partners to adapt for use in their own communication channels; and devising ideas for events to promote the initiative in their local areas.

Building an **online presence** was also crucial for this initiative, because signature collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and in-person events were therefore impossible. The organisers built a multilingual website with background information on the initiative, the demands of the initiative, and resources such as factsheets and campaign outlines. The organisers also built their online presence on social media: [Facebook](#) (15 000 followers), [Instagram](#) (37 600 followers), [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) (1 998 followers) and [Youtube](#) (229 subscribers).

Overall, the organisers of the 'Stop the Finning – Stop the Trade' initiative collected EUR 17 360 in support and funds. Only contributions of over EUR 500 per donor are reported.



Sources of Funding (€)



| Implementation of the campaign

The initiative’s organisers **identified 10 Member States to target and to reach the minimum threshold**: Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands and Austria. The organisers chose these countries for two reasons:

1. these countries are part of the shark fin trade and directly affected by the ECI proposals; and
2. most of the organiser’s partner organisations, volunteers and influencers operate in these countries.

As a result of the pandemic, the organisers had to revise their original campaign strategy and focus on their online presence and online signature collection. However, the extension of the signature collection period, the help of their network of partners, volunteers, and their strong social media campaign enabled the organisers to overcome this obstacle. Remarkably, through these partners, volunteers and social media campaigns the organisers were able to collect more than 500,000 signatures during the 20 days before the official end of their signature collection period. The key to this was raising awareness of the campaign and this is where **influencers played a vital role**

‘All this (social media campaigns and outreach) led to an increased awareness of our initiative! One needs to be patient –as well as confident ... That’s not always easy.’

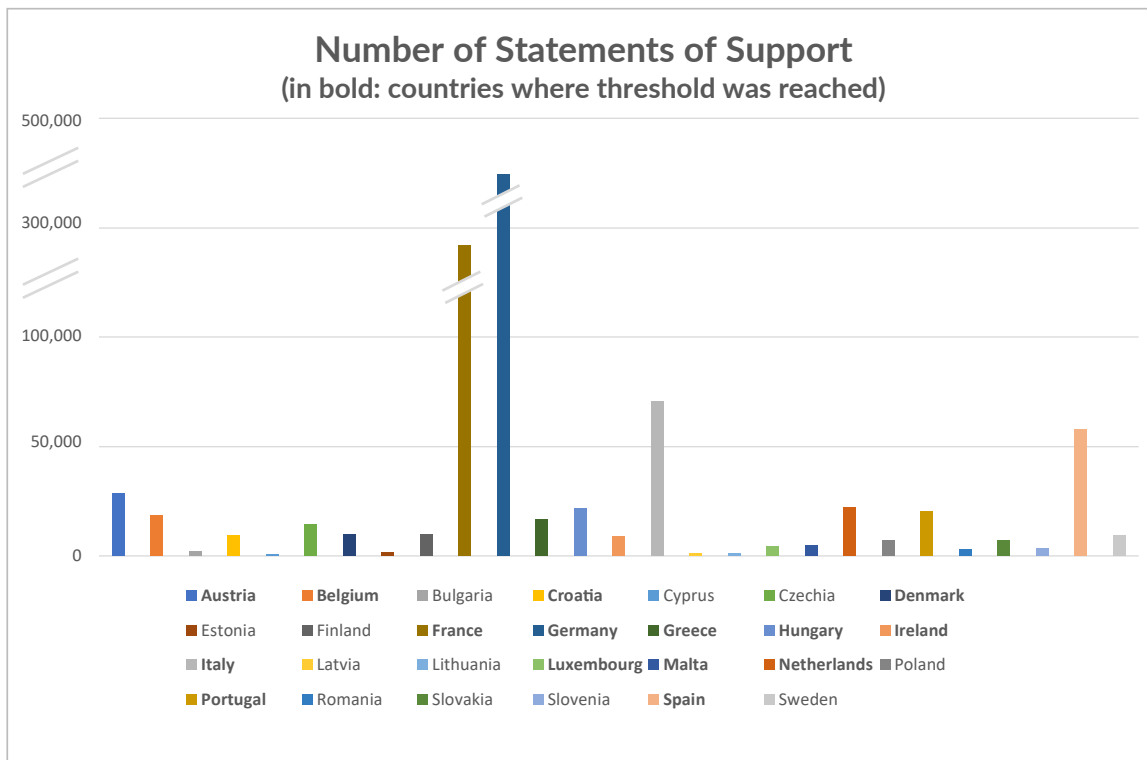
– ECI Organiser of Stop Finning

in the initiative's campaign. Each milestone reached by the organisers and volunteers, such as reaching the required threshold in a Member State, was an opportunity to inject more momentum into the initiative. The organisers also used the achievement of important milestones in marine conservation to promote their initiative and raise awareness. Despite the pandemic, the organisers were able to successfully organise some pan-EU events in major cities such as Rome, Athens and Berlin.



Collection of Signatures

The organisers of Stop Finning used the **central online collection system**. As a consequence of the pandemic, the collection of signatures became more difficult and slowed down during the campaign. The organisers used their network of partners and volunteers to maintain the momentum and continue promoting the initiative. Through influencers, the initiative gained quite a big social media presence. This had a huge impact on the campaign and resulted in the collection of more than 1.1 million signatures. For more information, please check out their [blog post](#) on the ECI Forum.



| Verification and submission

After the extension of the collection period, the initiative ultimately collected 1 202 121 signatures in 27 EU Member States of which 93% were considered valid signatures by the relevant national authorities. On 11 January 2023, the organisers arranged an event at the Place du Luxembourg in Brussels to celebrate the submission of the **1 119 996 million verified statements of support** to the Commission. More than 50 people from more than 10 EU countries gathered in front of the European Parliament to celebrate this moment ([See Social Media Post](#)). The submission of signatures opened the 6-month examination period.



3

The Impact of the Campaign

Examination and Commission answer

After the formal submission of the initiative, the organisers met with the **European Commissioner for the Environment, Ocean and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius**, on 6 February 2023 ([press release](#)). On 27 March 2023, the European Parliament held a public hearing on the 'Stop Finning – Stop the Trade' initiative ([recording of the public hearing](#)). The organisers presented the initiative's objectives and engaged with the Members of the European Parliament ([EP hearing highlights](#)). On 11 May 2023, the 'Stop Finning – Stop the Trade' initiative was debated in a plenary session of the European Parliament ([recording of the debate](#)).



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The Commission adopted, on 5 July 2023, a **communication setting out its actions in response** to the 'Stop Finning – Stop the Trade' ECI. The Commission welcomes the initiative and will take the following action ([see press release](#)):

1. examine the suitability of launching a legislative measure to end the trade in loose shark fins; and start an impact assessment on the environmental, social and economic consequences of applying the 'fins naturally attached' policy;
2. improve statistics on the trade in shark products by the end of 2024;
3. enhance the enforcement of EU traceability measures by strengthening the enforcement of EU law that applies to the entire value chain;
4. step up the EU's international action by advocating for a worldwide ban on shark finning and other actions.

On 13 July 2023, the organisers met with Commissioner Sinkevičius to discuss the Commission's response to the ECI. On 18 October 2023, the organisers of Stop Finning published a communication on the Commission's response, highlighting all the arguments that need to be considered for a fair and balanced impact assessment ([see press release](#)).



Hints and tips for future organisers

- Build up a large and strong network of partner organisations and volunteers before starting the campaign;
- Maintain communication with your network of partner organisations and volunteers;
- Create materials for the network of partner organisations and volunteers to publicise the initiative;
- Connect with celebrities and/or influencers through social media.

