

ANTI-SHARK'S FIN CAMPAIGN

Shark Savers rope in two NMPs

NMPs say they have no intention of using Parliament as a platform to push for ban

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SINGAPORE – About two weeks ago, a non-profit marine conservation group presented an open letter — signed by 41 leading scientists around the world, declaring the shark's fin trade to be unsustainable — to Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) Nicholas Fang.

Apart from Mr Fang, his fellow NMP Eugene Tan has also publicly endorsed Shark Savers Singapore's anti-shark's fin "I'm FINished" campaign — along with several celebrities. Companies, including supermarket chains, have also pledged their support.

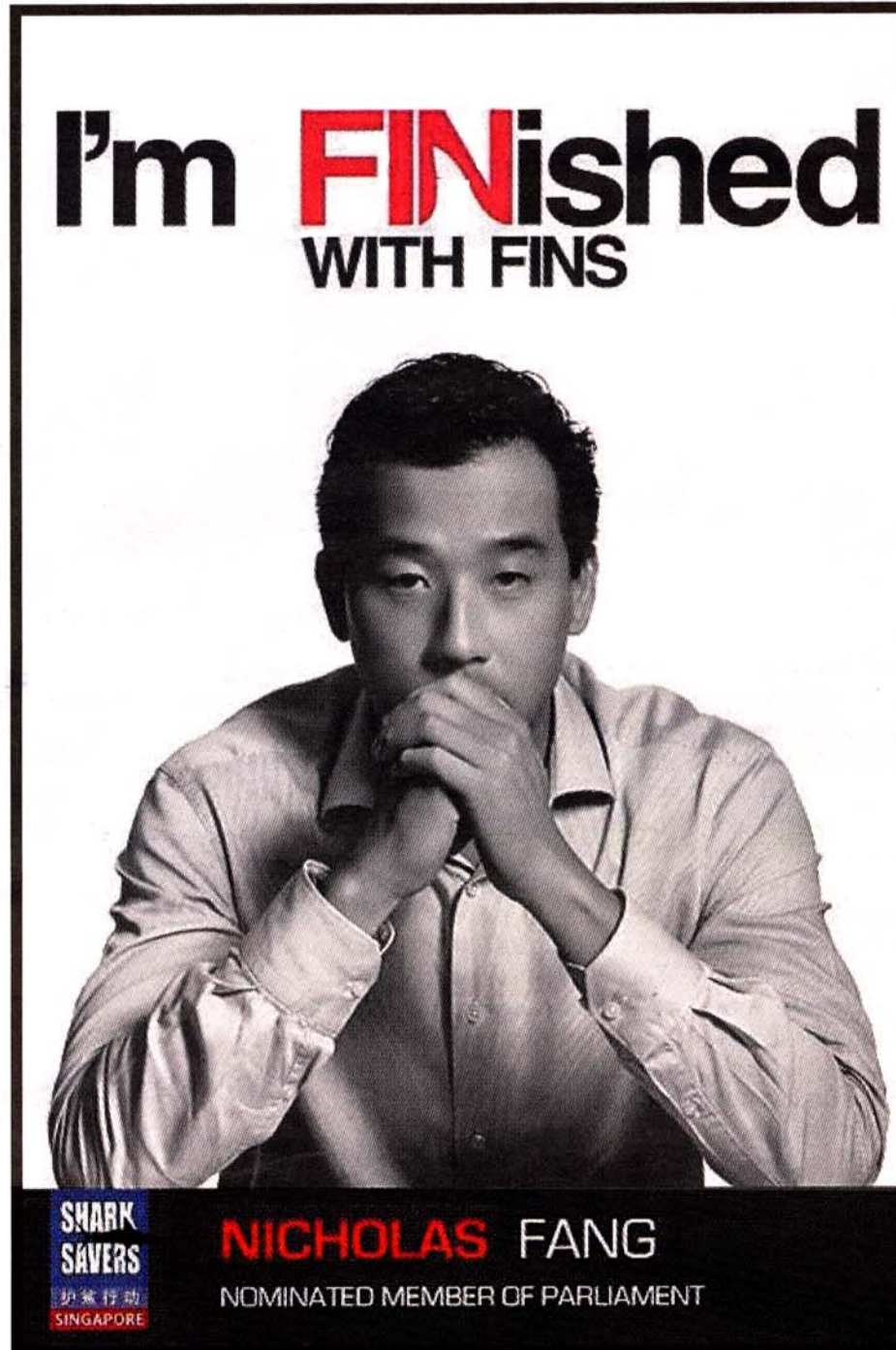
But for a country where lobbying is seen as a dirty word in politics, the public involvement of the two NMPs has raised some eyebrows — even as they told TODAY that they have no intention of using Parliament as a platform to push for a trade ban on shark's fin.

Mr Fang stressed: "It is still too early to say for sure what the right course of action necessarily is."

Assistant Professor Tan said a ban will create a black market demand for shark's fin. Instead, an educational approach would be far more effective, he said.

"So long as there's reduced demand, then we're likely to see reduced supply," said Asst Prof Tan, adding that he does not consider his appearance on Shark Savers' posters as lobbying.

Asst Prof Tan noted that not advocating a legislative approach, however, does not preclude MPs from raising relevant questions on the issue in Parliament, such as whether shark's fins are served at state banquets, and how much is being consumed here.



NMP Nicholas Fang, along with several celebrities, has publicly endorsed Shark Savers Singapore's anti-shark's fin 'I'm FINished' campaign.

Yesterday, Shark Savers announced that it had passed the letter to Mr Fang.

While its director John Lu said he believes "legislation is the way" ahead, he stressed that he had presented the

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Mr Nicholas Fang
 NOMINATED MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

letter to Mr Fang, a former journalist, to raise awareness, in response to "misinformation" perpetuated in some sections of the media that the shark's fin trade is sustainable.

The anti-shark's fin campaign has gained traction here in recent years, albeit with its fair share of controversy.

Most recently in March, Marine conservation group Sea Shepherd called for the removal of Singaporean wildlife consultant Dr Giam Choo-Hoo from a United Nations (UN) convention that regulates endangered-species trade.

The group accused Dr Giam of being a representative of the shark's fin industry.

Mr Lu told TODAY that so far he has not approached any elected MPs to be part of Shark Savers' campaign. He explained that it was simply a matter of opportunity and through personal connections that he had managed to get the two NMPs on board.

Experienced elected Members of Parliament (MPs) TODAY spoke to noted that lobbying by politicians — elected or otherwise — has not been a common feature of the political landscape here, for various reasons.

Ang Mo Kio Group Representation Constituency MP Inderjit Singh noted that people are free to give their feedback and "it's up to the MP whether the issue should be raised, and which channel it should be raised through".

Joo Chiat MP Charles Chong concurred, noting that "part of a politician's job is to lobby for worthy causes".

However, from his experience, "the more public lobbying you do, the less likely it is to succeed" compared to behind-the-scenes lobbying, he said.

The sixth term MP said: "All MPs should look at issues that affect the people ... for the better good of society and the better good of the country."

He added: "How they push for it I suppose depends on each individual."



LETTER OPEN LETTER PRESENTED TO NMP FANG

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