



SHARK-BASED TOURISM AND ENCOUNTERS

A link between white shark encounters by ocean users and white shark tourism activities that involve chumming and baiting has been claimed in the wake of shark encounters that recently occurred in the inshore waters of Cape Town. However, no evidence has been presented confirming this allegation.

The Facts

1. Research started in 1998 to investigate the impact that chumming has on shark behaviour. Results have found no evidence to link white shark viewing and cage diving operations with an increase in risk to ocean users from white sharks in the inshore waters of Cape Town.
2. Some degree of conditioning may occur between white sharks and chumming when operators do not comply with regulations and allow sharks to feed on the bait (when sharks receive a reward). However, it appears that this conditioning is merely between the shark and the boat and cannot be linked to any conditioning with humans as a potential prey item.
3. Conversely, when white shark tourism operators abide by the regulations and sharks do not gain any reward, negative conditioning occurs and the animals quickly lose interest in the boat and move away. Such sharks begin to ignore chumming and baiting vessels as they are perceived to represent a 'false promise' of food.
4. The problem of some operators not complying with their permit regulations and repeatedly feeding sharks is largely driven by client expectations of the JAWS experience (aggressive sharks wrestling with the bait). This, however, can be remedied by limiting the amount of bait carried on cage diving boats, implementing an independent observer programme on each boat to monitor compliance and create greater awareness among the tourists about cage diving regulations, and providing tourists with channels where complaints may be registered and in turn taking appropriate action against offending operators.
5. Even the perception of a link between shark viewing and cage diving operations and white shark encounters is detrimental to shark conservation, and the long-term viability of the shark-based tourism industry. For this reason it is essential that the operators work with the authorities to ensure an open, transparent, monitored and publicly reported industry.





Fact Sheet

6. Sound scientific research on the effects of shark viewing and cage diving on white sharks must continue. It is also crucial that not all white shark congregation sites are opened to shark-based tourism. Such sites represent important comparative research sites and will limit the industry's ecological impact on the white shark.



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