

# UNDERSTANDING THE PERCEIVED CONSERVATION BENEFITS OF SHARK-MARINE TOURISM (SMT)

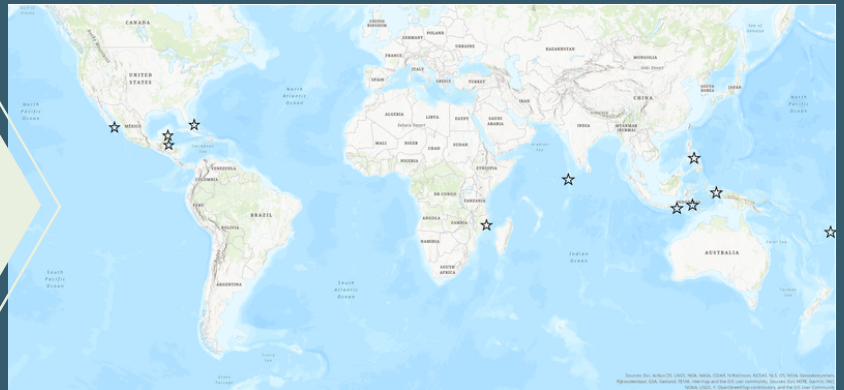


Aliya Siddiqi  
aliya.siddiqi@my.jcu.edu.au



Shark-marine tourism (SMT) can be used as a conservation tool by providing a potential alternative livelihood option for, or increasing awareness of resource users and their communities. However, diversification via tourism can create complex issues relating to the environment, policies, and local well-being. This study aimed to understand perceptions regarding how SMT programs or projects can provide tangible benefits for both sharks and people.

This study conducted interviews with 15 individuals (8 NGOs or scientists; 7 tourism operators) based in 11 different locations. Six respondents were working in their country of origin.



## DESIRED OUTCOMES OF SUCCESS + SUGGESTIONS

**MISMATCHED OBJECTIVES:** the most desired *outcomes* of operations were social and economic benefits, however most *aims* related to biological conservation and/or tourism management.

### SOCIAL BENEFITS

Provide **specific skills & knowledge** related to tourism or marine conservation, or to decrease reliance on exploitative practices.

**Build trust** via community development programs, like swim clubs. **Identify local leaders** or those who could benefit (e.g. senior fishers) from increased awareness.

### STEWARDSHIP BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Respondents observed this as **necessary for sustainability and scalability**.

- **Build leadership, problem-solving skills**
- **Support independent** tourism operations or conservation initiatives (especially in youth)
- Provide **enabling environment** (incentives, compensation, alternatives) - quick turnaround of income helps



"...more than more than anything, I find myself trying to help people. And if you help people, then often you help the species that ultimately, you're trying to protect"

- Big, international NGO respondent

### ECONOMIC VALUE INTO LOCAL COMMUNITY

- **Direct employment**
- **Investor filtration & regulation** - community helps decide who can invest in area, operation requirements (employment, community support), eco-tourism traits
- **Financial savings mechanism** such as user fee or fund to support development, enforcement or management.
- **Value chain analysis** to determine who receives tourism profits and how it is distributed

"Nothing is more important than the people that really are the stewards of that resource to take ownership of it and to have a vested interest in protecting it"

- Tourism operator

## HOW ARE THESE OUTCOMES MEASURED?

Respondents often measured outcomes **by results**; such as gaining a marine protected area, building skills or income, collaboration with locals, adhering to codes of conduct, or that sharks were still present in water.

**Active measurements** of social or economic-based outcomes were found to be **rare**; though some respondents said they were ongoing or planned for the future. **Capacity limitations** were a common reason for the lack of measurements.

## SUGGESTED SOCIAL/ECONOMIC MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES

- Change of household incomes or standard of living
- Household tourism involvement
- Change in education levels or conservation awareness
- Value chain analysis
- Political willingness (technical budgets)

## ROLE OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS OR ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS

### BUILDS STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

- NGOs can help form community cooperatives or working groups to then help work with government.
- **Communicate** to wider community to help them understand benefits.
- Involving locals helps **disperse knowledge** throughout the community.
- Creates a wider network (other NGOs, scientists, etc.) for better technical support and **holistic conservation**.

### SUSTAINS ENGAGEMENT

Identifying **needs, aspirations, and drivers of resource exploitation** can help:

- Develop personal relationships
- Increase **equity, justice, inclusiveness**
  - Understand what locals perceive as fair
  - Include all portions of community
- Identify community-desired economic pursuits to fund

*"...I came here as your friend. I came here as an adviser. I fortunately have some knowledge from my previous experience. I give you advice. I give you suggestions, I give you this knowledge. And it's up to you to take that and do whatever you want. But if you don't want to go with my suggestion, [then] have a good day; and that's basically what my mentality has been to the communities."*

- Local NGO Respondent

## EFFECTIVENESS AS A CONSERVATION TOOL

Tourism was viewed as effective, but with certain considerations (*see figure at right*). If SMT is being conducted, it should address how to provide benefits to the wider community. Any financial or institutional resources should help advocate for community health and development, and/or their other stated aspirations and needs. Most respondents explicitly acknowledged that this more holistic conservation strategy requires time to create meaningful change, or to be able to record that change.

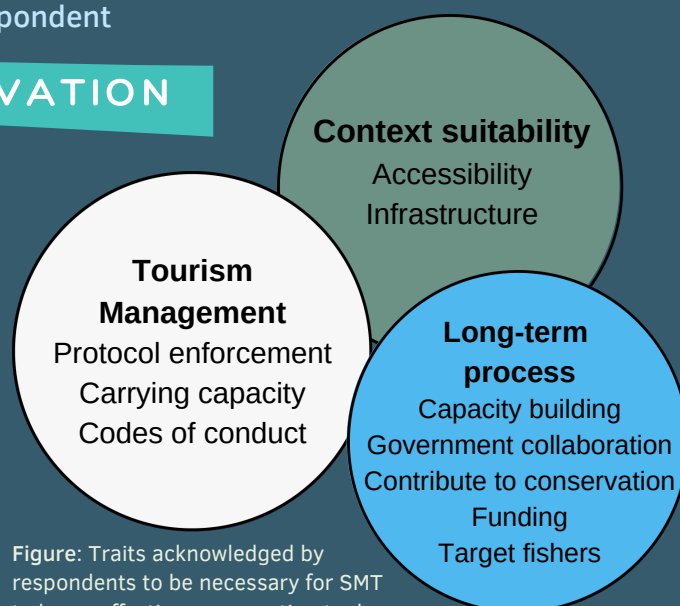


Figure: Traits acknowledged by respondents to be necessary for SMT to be an effective conservation tool.