

➤ Eric Clua on Shark Feeding!



Bull Shark traffic in the [Arena](#) at 30m - click for detail!

Don't worry - no [rant](#) this time!

Actually, it's quite the contrary!

I must say, I'm increasingly impressed by the quality of people who have decided to come pay us a visit as of late. Maybe it's the incessant ranting on this blog or maybe it's even the disclaimer at the bottom of [our home page](#) - but the trend is unequivocal: the activists and adrenaline hunters are thankfully going somewhere else and being replaced by truly remarkable personalities who combine a passion for Sharks with solid knowledge and a refreshingly pragmatic and solution-oriented approach to Shark conservation.

Case in point, [Erich Clua](#).

He popped in the other day and what ensued, apart from the inevitable bonding of Shark aficionados and some stellar pictures, see on top, was a remarkable discussion about the pros and cons of baited Shark diving. Eric is of course none other than the lead author of the [Lemon feeding paper](#) and French on top of that, and I was bracing myself for an explosion of Gallic *outrage* about the irreverence of my comments. But I must really say, Eric was nothing but constructive and genuinely interested in feedback - and yes, it may have helped that I know French Polynesian Shark diving politics in general and the Moorea Lemon Shark dive in particular, and that I was able to converse in passable French! :)

But I'm digressing as usual.

The fact is that Eric is a passionate Shark diver with a big heart for Shark conservation, and that he conducts fantastic Shark research in New Caledonia and in French Polynesia - in brief, the exact opposite of those bloviating *Sesselfurzer*! Despite being professionally active in [another field](#), he is also a big honcho at the [SPC](#) and thus in an ideal position for furthering and disseminating desperately needed modern Shark conservation concepts (= *forget the quotas: don't kill them at all!*) across the SOPAC.

This is one of the many reasons for why I like [his article](#).

It's included in the SPC's [Fisheries Newsletter](#) and has thus been read by policymakers across the Pacific. In case anybody should have forgotten, it is them and not the clamoring conservationists who will ultimately draft, or not draft any legislation protecting the marine resources we are so passionate about, and it is thus them we need to convince!

My personal wish: that it may finally spawn some reflection within the arcane halls of the [SPTO](#) and of [SPREP](#) whose representatives have so far displayed an equally irritating and ignorant aversion for our industry, this despite of the obvious benefits for both tourism and marine [conservation](#).

Any caveats? Most certainly! :)

They center around the assertion that [feeding quickly leads to dependence](#) when food is easily available, as well as to sharks' becoming accustomed to the presence of humans. Humans are soon associated with food and otherwise wary, distant sharks no longer hesitate in approaching humans and even entering into close contact with them. This significantly heightens the risk of accidental biting (e.g. a shark biting a diver's limb that it mistakes for food) or intentional biting out of domination or territorial instincts.

Re-read [this](#) and you will know where I'm coming from on this topic: there is *ZERO* evidence that Sharks become *dependent* on handouts; and whereas I fully concur that the risk of bites (mind you: during the feed!) does indeed increase, I miss the unequivocal statement that the remedy is to implement better procedures, not to prohibit or demonize the feeding *per se*.

Examples?

[The food is then released, and a hectic swirl ensues](#) equals *dumping* which can result in feeding frenzies. We advocate always keeping control of the bait (e.g. by hand feeding) or only releasing the bait once the clients have left. Equally, we advocate single user sites where the animals are being conditioned to an always uniform and thus predictable routine. French Polynesian Shark feeding sites are however generally free-for-alls where different operators try to one-up their competitors in macho showmanship, which is a notorious problem in Moorea where the Lemons have even been lured to the surface by snorkeling boats.

In brief: if Moorea wants to continue enjoying the benefits of a thriving Shark tourism industry, somebody there has to put a stop to the shenanigans. Eric being a client of those dive ops cannot quite say it that openly - but I am quite certain that he concurs!

And what about the increased dependency and aggression?

We do not at all have the same experience. Our data clearly show that there is no increased residency in our Bulls, as despite of the ever increasing numbers, single individual animals only pop by for short periods of time, weeks at best, but spend the majority of their life elsewhere, likely roaming for food; also, they leave during the mating season and we are thus not witnessing their possibly heightened aggression like what is happening with those male Lemons.

But as always, granted, those are completely different Sharks, at a completely different site, with completely different procedures!

Long story short?

I really have to commend Eric. The article is interesting, very much in favor of Shark conservation and the Shark diving industry and refreshingly nuanced where it touches upon the more controversial aspects.

Very well done indeed!

As he writes in a recent message: *[Nous jouons dans la même équipe!](#)*


Posted by DaShark at [3:50 PM](#) 

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