



# MARINE MEGAFUNA FOUNDATION

## **MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WHALE SHARK (*Rhincodon typus*) IN THE BAZARUTO AREA NATIONAL PARK**

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Whale shark are the largest fish in the world, growing to 20 m length and 80-100 years in age. Although they are true sharks, they feed solely on zooplankton and tiny fish. They are completely harmless to people, and are popular in the marine tourism industry.

Whale shark populations have been greatly depleted by targeted fisheries, accidental catches in nets and boat strikes. The species is globally Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, and they are listed species on both CITES and CMS (Appendix II).

Inhambane Province is a global hotspot for whale sharks, with approximately 10% of the world's identified whale sharks having been recorded here. Over 650 individual sharks have been documented from Mozambique. Although they are capable of long distance movements, many sharks return frequently to Mozambique.

Whale shark are economically valuable with marine tourists. Tourist surveys conducted around Praia do Tofo and Barra found that the presence of whale shark was 'somewhat important' (24%) or 'very important' (74%) to the decision to take a dive tour. For foreigners, the presence of whale shark was rated as 'quite important' (28%) or 'extremely important' (51%) in their decision to visit Mozambique. Tourists spent an average of US\$1, 595 within Inhambane Province itself. If whale shark were not present in Inhambane province, 36% of tourists would

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not have come to Mozambique, and an additional 34% would have spent less time in the country.

Research from the Praia do Tofo area documented a 79% decline in whale shark sightings between 2005 and 2011. This decline has persisted into 2015. The cause is likely to be a combination of ocean climate variability and local human pressures. Coastal gill nets are a significant threat to whale sharks, which are often found close inshore. Mozambique is one of the few countries in which the species remains unprotected, and the sharks' habitat is not effectively protected.

Whale shark routinely use the BANP region, including the park itself. See the accompanying maps for documentation of whale shark presence through satellite-linked tags and aerial surveys. The main whale shark habitat is the ocean sides of San Sebastian Peninsula and the islands within BANP.

A southern extension to the BANP, to encompass the northern tip of San Sebastian Peninsula, would protect the main whale shark habitat in northern Inhambane Province. Whale shark would benefit from specific species-level protection, restriction of gill net use and management oversight of the developing marine tourism industry within the BANP region.