



## **SHARK SAFETY TIPS FACT SHEET**

Despite the odds being low that you will encounter a white shark while surfing, diving or swimming, any marine recreation activity along South Africa's coastline carries the risk of an unplanned encounter with *Carcharodon carcharias*, the Great White Shark. A list of basic principles have been provided that if followed will not only decrease your chances of encountering a great white shark, but increase the odds of a safe ending for both shark and humans, should you ever meet the world's largest predatory fish.

### **General Principles**

1. If you are not fully aware of all of the risks of bathing in the ocean and are not prepared to take these risks, do not go into the ocean.
2. White sharks, like all predators, are more likely to identify a solitary individual as potential prey, so try to remain in a group.
3. White sharks are primarily visual hunters which would normally allow them to correctly distinguish you from their preferred prey species. Therefore, avoid entering the ocean when it is murky, during darkness or twilight hours when sharks rely on their other senses to locate potential prey rather than their vision.
4. When encountering a white shark remain as calm as you can. Assess the situation. Do not panic! Panicked, erratic movements are likely to increase the shark's curiosity, draw it closer to you and possibly send signals similar to an injured or distressed prey. Use any equipment (camera, surfboard, etc.) you may be carrying to create a barrier between yourself and the shark.
5. If you see a shark, calmly alert other ocean users around you. Remain in or create a group, and leave the water in a calm and swift, but smooth, manner. Alert the lifeguards or shark spotters.

### **Scuba divers**

1. If you encounter a white shark while scuba diving stay motionless on the bottom until the shark has satisfied its curiosity and moves on. It appears that the water column is the most dangerous place to be and surfacing quickly in close proximity to a great white could put you in danger. If in a group, stick together! On a shore dive swim back to the land by hugging the reef and using your compass or natural contour lines for navigation. If on a boat dive, surface as a group, back to back.

## **Free divers and snorkelers**

1. Free divers and snorkelers are most vulnerable when on the surface or when ascending from a dive. So only dive when the water is clear enough to see the bottom and be vigilant.
2. In the Western Cape, remain within the confines of the kelp bed whenever possible. White sharks are unlikely to enter the dense kelp growth.

## **Spearfishermen**

1. Understand that spear fishing off the South African coast is a high-risk activity when it comes to white sharks. To decrease the risk, don't dive and shoot fish close to white shark hotspots, such as Dyer or Seal Island.
2. Only shoot fish in good visibility so that you can see an approaching shark from a distance and take evasive action by surrendering your fish.
3. If diving from the shore keep your fish on a long stringer or on a buoy, but ideally dive with boat cover so that wounded or dead fish can be removed from the water quickly.

## **Surfers and bodyboarders**

1. Preferably use surfing beaches where shark spotters and trained lifeguards are stationed.
2. Surf during the hours that the shark spotters and lifeguards are on duty.
3. Familiarise yourself with the shark spotters protocols and the different colour flags that are used.
4. Take the time to speak to the shark spotters and lifeguards before entering the water and ask them if there have been recent sightings in the area.
5. Avoid surfing when the water is too murky for shark spotters to be effective – when visibility is poor the black flag will be flown.
6. Don't surf in areas where bait and game fish are running, where seals are present or seabirds are diving. Sightings of dolphins or porpoises do not indicate the absence of sharks.
7. Consider wearing a personal shark shield.

## **Surf skiers and kayakers**

1. Avoid paddling in areas known to be frequented by white sharks, such as near seal colonies and in areas where they congregate inshore in the summer months.
2. When approached by a white shark stop paddling and sit still. It is the movement of the kayak that the shark is the most interested in.
3. Use a large kayak, as it seems that the bigger the craft the less likely a white shark is to venture an investigatory bite.
4. Paddle in groups.
5. Consider carrying a personal shark shield on your kayak or surfski.