



AFRICAN SHARK CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

Australia is recognised as a world leader in shark conservation and shark fisheries management. Terry Walker, one of Australia's leading shark experts based at the Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute (MAFRI) in Queenscliff, recently returned from South Africa where he was a keynote speaker at the 'African Shark Conservation and Management Workshop' in Cape Town. Terry was invited to share his expertise and knowledge on this matter with the other participants. Nineteen African countries took part in the workshop as well as invited specialists from six other countries—Australia, Canada, France, Germany, UK and USA.

During 1997–2000, Terry helped develop the International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA- Sharks) for the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). He wrote the technical guidelines for implementation of the IPOA-Sharks, which were recently published as part of FAO's Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries series. This important document recognises that sharks require special management, research and monitoring and it outlines a process whereby countries work towards developing national and regional 'Shark Assessment Reports' and 'Shark Plans' designed to ensure that shark resources are used sustainably. Terry is currently part of a national working group developing Australia's Shark Assessment Report and National Shark Plan in response to the IPOA-Sharks.

The African workshop involved extensive discussions on shark fisheries management and the problems of shark conservation and management in Africa and also worldwide. African waters support some 25% of the world's shark biodiversity including many shark species that are found nowhere else in the world. Shark fisheries in Africa provide important social and economic benefits to the African people; however, in recent years, there has been concern over the increase in shark catches and the consequences that this has for shark populations in Africa. The workshop identified the urgent need for African nations to implement the IPOA-Sharks, thus building on their long tradition of wildlife management and conservation that has traditionally focussed on terrestrial animals.

While in Africa, Terry also visited the 'Natal Shark Board', which is the world's leading research agency for the management of risks associated with shark attacks on humans. The Natal Shark Board has also led the investigation and application of electric fields for creating shark exclusion areas. This has potential application to Victoria as mariculture grow-out industries develop.

Terry's input to the workshop was invaluable, not only for the African participants, but also for furthering Australia's own commitment to the sustainable use and conservation of shark resources. Since many shark species have a wide-ranging distribution and migrate over long distances, it is important to have international cooperation for shark research, monitoring, conservation, and management.