

Project Update: September 2012

Mozambique is a global hotspot for whale sharks. Unfortunately, these gentle giants are increasingly at risk from the indiscriminate use of large gill nets along the coast. We need to find out where the major threats are coming from, the human impact on whale sharks, and to work with these fishers to implement a practical and effective protection strategy.

Although whale sharks have been hit hard by fisheries in several countries, the Western Indian Ocean has historically been a rather peaceful area. Sadly, as more gill nets are deployed along the Mozambican coast, this situation seems to be changing for the worse.

Back in 2006 I saw [my first net-entangled whale shark](#). The poor thing had huge cuts in both its pectoral fins, which were slowly but surely being amputated, and another deep cut across its back. This one had a lucky escape - I was able to swim back to the boat, grab a knife and cut the net off - but a lot of sharks aren't so fortunate. We're often seeing sharks that have lost fins or sustained major injuries during their struggle to escape - and some have even washed ashore dead.

These nets are not just affecting whale sharks, either. They're also catching manta rays, dugongs and other threatened species. We need to: (1) provide the Mozambican government with the information they need to make good management decisions; and (2) work directly with the fishers themselves to find a practical solution.

