

# Big, fast and beautiful: the bronzy is an ocean celeb

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at SWAKOPMUND

NOT many people would consider themselves a friend of sharks. In Namibia there is one person who could be seen as a guardian angel of sharks, especially the bronze whaler shark.

Dr Hannies Holtzhausen, large pelagic sector fisheries biologist at the National Marine Information and Research Centre (Natmirc), is a member of the Shark Specialist Group of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and initiator of the Namibian Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (NPOA).

The plan, based on the United Nations Food & Agricultural Organisation International Plan of Action for the Conserva-

tion and Management of Sharks, came into force at the beginning of March.

This makes Namibia one of a few select countries to have such an action plan in place.

Holtzhausen is also the principal investigator of a project working on the development of a management plan for bronze whaler shark resources in the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (BCLME) region.

## FIN FAME

If Holtzhausen had his way, he would see to it that the bronze whaler shark, locally known as the copper shark or bronzy, was granted special status - the same as that bestowed on the Great White Shark: this

status prevents anyone from killing or maiming the specific protected species.

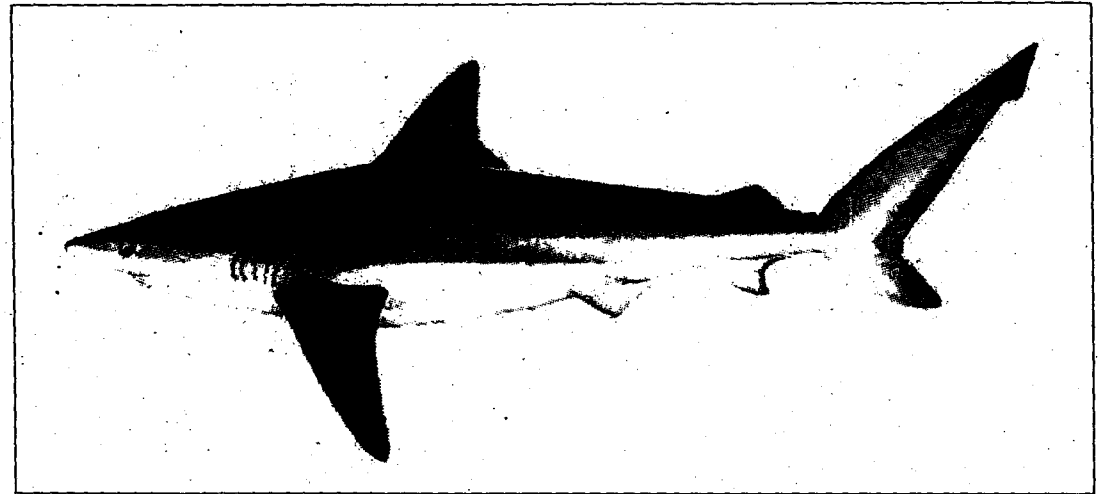
The bronzy has made Namibia world famous in the world of fishing.

Angling tourists flock to the country as it is the only place in the world where this species can be caught from the beach.

According to Holtzhausen, 99,9 per cent of bronzy sharks reeled in by anglers are returned to the ocean. Many anglers have taken part in a tagging project that has been running since 1989.

In South Africa, the bronzy is also targeted by sport anglers, while recreational anglers harvest them for their meat and fins.

In Angola the bronzy is caught for meat and fins.



POPULAR ... The bronzy shark is a popular angling shark and occurs in the surf zone up to a depth of 100 metres. The shark can grow to a length of three metres.

The harvesting of bronze whaler sharks mainly takes place in southern Angola at Baía dos Tigres, which is thought to be the breeding ground and nursery area for juveniles of this species.

For the purposes of the BCLME project, it is hypothesised that one population inhabits the BCLME region and therefore co-management of the resource is imperative. The objective of the project is to determine the bronzy's distribution, abundance and population structure in order to ensure sustainable management of the resource in the region.

The bronzy is one of the slowest growing of all shark species and is thus

particularly sensitive to over-exploitation.

The study, which started in July last year, will run until July 2006.

More than 1 000 sharks have already been tagged, according to Holtzhausen. The method of tagging and recapturing fish helps to determine the sharks' movement patterns and to calculate growth rates.

Biological data, such as length, weight, sex ratios is collected at the same time.

In addition, satellite tags would also be used in the study, said Holtzhausen. The satellite tag enables scientists to track the sharks' movements for as long as it remains fitted.

"It is of utmost im-

portance that we protect our sharks," said Holtzhausen.

He feels that another important aspect of the BCLME project is to show the Angolans other benefits of sharks, instead of just killing them.

## BIG BUCKS

It is estimated that angling tourists bring in more than N\$15 million a year for Namibia.

On the fishing industry's side, there are four fishery types that catch various shark species: either as target species or as by-catch.

According to Holtzhausen, the industry did not have a problem with the shark management plan in general.

One measure contained in the management plan that he would like to see implemented as a matter of urgency is the 100 per cent deployment of on-board fisheries observers on all vessels catching sharks.

"At the moment we often get the excuse that there is no place for an observer on board, especially on the long-line vessels," he said.

Namibian regulations prevent the finning of sharks as the dumping of any marine resource harvested is prohibited.

The industry has been requested to keep the pelvic and dorsal fins of sharks which are caught to make the identification process easier.