

SHARK NETS

Stakeholders Think Tank

CreateConsulting 
FACILITATION • LEARNING SOLUTIONS • COACHING



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
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Introduction

Tourism in KwaZulu-Natal was so negatively impacted by shark attacks in the 1950s and 1960s that shark nets were introduced to protect bathers. However, the unfortunate reality is that shark nets kill hundreds of sharks, dolphins, turtles and stingrays each year. While the KZN Sharks Board is working hard to reduce the impact of the nets on marine life, alternative options for bathing protection are limited due to big swell conditions.

"It's a controversial practice," says Shanan Atkins, Marine Biologist and Ph.D. candidate of the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) who explains that sharks have become vulnerable to extinction. *"We cannot afford to lose more of these vital animals but it's difficult to withdraw protection as people's lives and livelihoods are at stake."*

Believing that there is a win-win solution, Shanan gathered the stakeholders closest to the issue to explore opportunities for change.

Our contribution

Shanan reached out to CreateConsulting to design and facilitate an online Shark Nets Stakeholder Meeting for approximately 30 to 40 participants. Our first step was to ensure an understanding of the purpose and objectives for the session.

Purpose

Wanting to create a constructive platform for discussion, Shanan required a professionally-facilitated process that would lead to information gain, learning among participants, conflict resolution, enhanced trust and win-win solutions.

OBJECTIVES

- **Create an engaging virtual space** for participants to brainstorm ways to reduce the human-wildlife conflict around shark nets
- **Provide the opportunity for a constructive co-learning conversation** as a catalyst for sustainable change
- **Enable the best environment** for participants to think deeply, listen intently, share ideas and co-create a way forward.

CreateConsulting gets to work

To meet the objectives, we designed an online conversation using the World Café methodology and Thinking Environment™ as frameworks. A **World Café** is a structured conversational process for knowledge sharing in which groups of people discuss a topic at several small tables like those in a café. Some degree of formality may be retained to make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak.

The **Thinking Environment**™ is a philosophy of communication, based on the work of Nancy Kline. It is a practical series of values-based applications which are useful in family, campaigning, community and organisational life. It also forms the basis of a teaching pedagogy and coaching approach. Once designed, key role players were invited to join a dry run to walk through the process, reconnect to objectives and answer any emerging questions.

The Shark Net online event took place on 1 March 2022 with a variety of stakeholders invited to be part of the conversation: *DFFE: Oceans Conservation Strategies; DFFE: Biodiversity and Coastal Research; SA Association for Marine Biological Research; KZN Sharks Board; SouSA Consortium; Oceans Research; City of Cape Town; WildOceans; SANBI; KZN Treasury; North West University; Wildlife & Environment Society of SA; EDTEA, Environmental Affairs; EDTEA, Tourism; EDTEA, Legal; Endangered Wildlife Trust; Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife; uMhlathuze Municipality; Oceanographic Research Institute; SharkSpotters; Tourism KZN and GWK.*



The conversation began by creating a Thinking Environment™. This brought focus to the key principles required to achieve best thinking and how participants could create this environment together. This was followed by a short presentation where Shanan shared her research findings and outlined the three conversation topics for the day: **obstacles to change, opportunities to change and the way forward.**

Enabling participation & collaboration

To give participants the opportunity to unpack the topics and share ideas, three 20-minute breakout sessions were used. Participants were randomly selected for the first session and allocated to four breakout rooms. Thereafter, participants were carefully placed to ensure different stakeholder combinations for the following discussions. Each session focused on one topic and followed a structured conversation to ensure participation and attention.

To encourage collaboration and harvest everyone's best thinking, live notetaking was used. After each session, the group hosts were invited to share the essence of their conversation for discussion with the bigger group.

To ensure that everything ran smoothly, our team managed the technical requirements and moved between allocated break-out rooms to provide facilitation, encouragement and support.

Following the session, we provided a comprehensive feedback pack. This included a high-level summary of the presentation to share with participants, breakout room notes for each conversation and a harvest document reflecting the conversations that were captured and the themes that emerged.

"The feedback was so heartening. The attendees noted their appreciation of the opportunity to engage others, learn about the diverse perspectives and work together towards a common goal.

They used words like constructive, level-headed and passionate. Most importantly, they appreciated the collective willingness to find solutions and were inspired to create positive change."

Shanan Atkins, Marine Biologist and Ph.D. candidate
of the University of Witwatersrand (Wits)

A successful journey

When asked about her experience of the process, Shanan shared:

“Mel and her team designed and hosted our knowledge café with great success. They set the tone of listening with respect, equality among participants, and ease, in other words slowing down and being fully present. They expertly moved us in and out of virtual rooms, allowing people to be in groups that were small enough for everyone to have a chance to speak yet allowing each person to be exposed to a greater variety of perspectives - a great way to encourage the cross-pollination of ideas.

The result was a genuinely collaborative atmosphere and easy exchanges among participants.”

The participants reported that engaging in constructive co-learning conversation has successfully put them on the path to finding a sustainable solution to reduce human-wildlife conflict.

When asked what they appreciated most about their time together, they shared that that are optimistic about finding a sustainable solution. They expressed their appreciation for the diversity of perspectives, thoughts and ideas shared in the hope of protecting humans, sharks and other marine wildlife.



We are incredibly passionate about supporting initiatives that contribute toward a sustainable future for both humans and wildlife. As such, it was a pleasure to support this powerful initiative.

We are proud to have facilitated a Thinking Environment™ for stakeholders to connect, speak, listen and co-create toward a way forward.

Connect with us today



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