

Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

## The Direct Value of Sharks to the Marine Tourism Industry

An estimated 500,000 divers a year find, photograph and swim with sharks, contributing millions of dollars to local and regional economies around the world.

On the Great Barrier Reef, MTSRF-funded researchers from James Cook University have estimated the average liveaboard dive passenger spent at least **\$5,000** while in the Cairns/Port Douglas area, with many attracted to the region by the opportunity to view sharks in the wild. The researchers estimate that up to **25%** (or **\$1,375**) of each visitor's expenditure was directly attributable to the opportunity to see sharks.

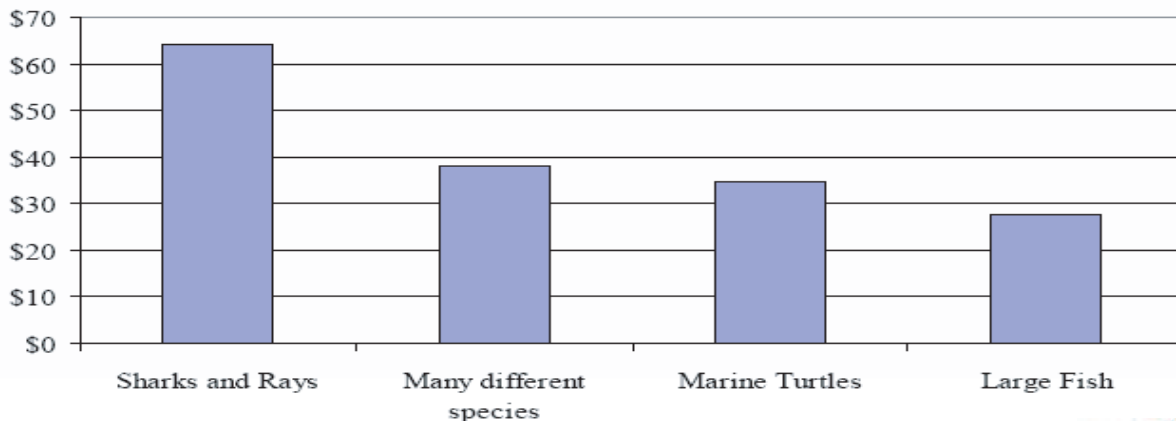


Similar results were found in the Maldives. The estimated value of one grey reef shark to the Maldivian tourism industry was US\$3,300/year as opposed to one-time value of US\$32 to a fisherman.

Shark sightings were one of the most significant wildlife interactions to increase satisfaction of passengers on live-aboard dive trips on the Great Barrier Reef.

Though the Great Barrier Reef supports great diversity of animals, liveaboard divers say that they are willing to pay more for a guaranteed shark sighting than for other marine creatures.

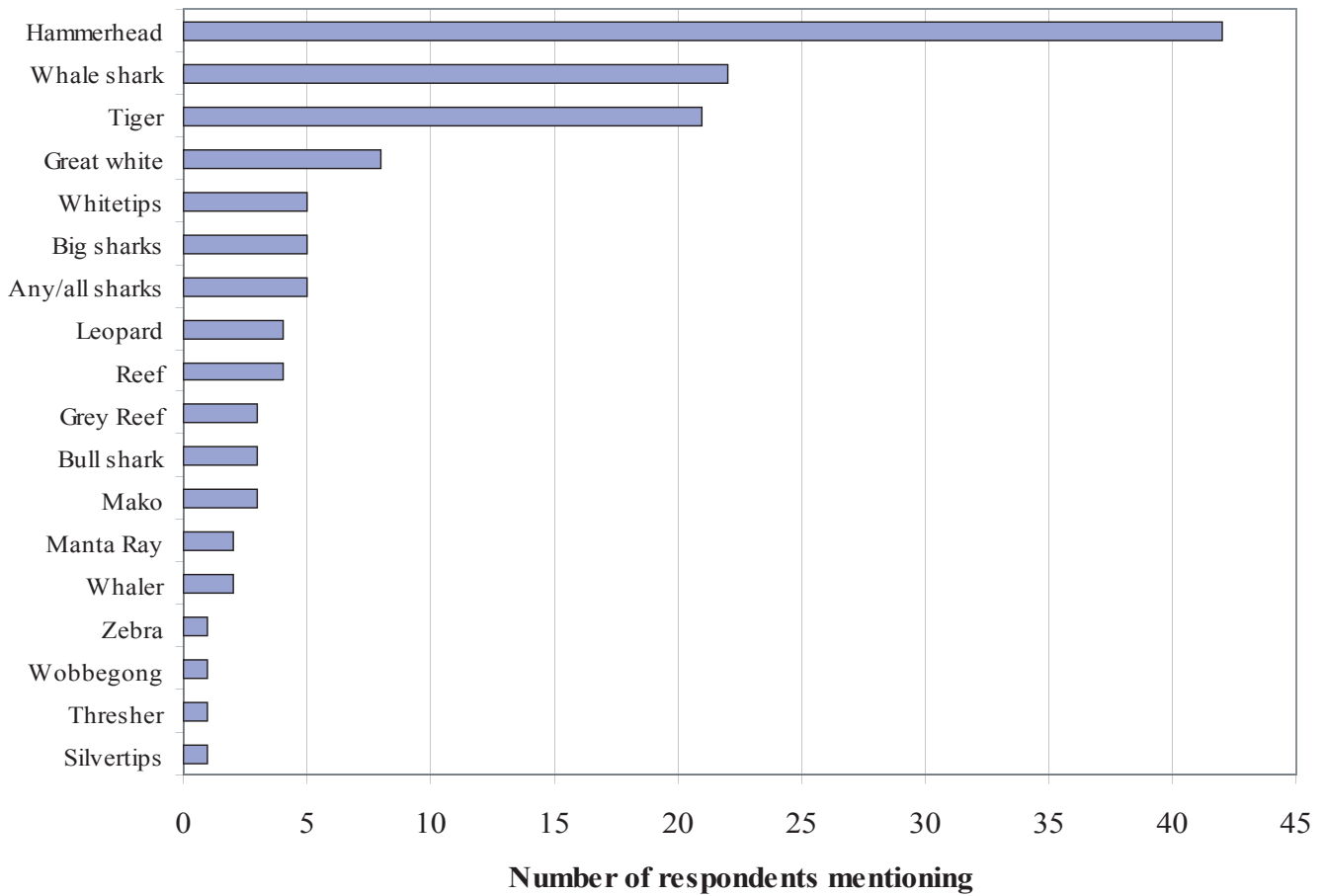
Mean willingness to pay for a 100% 'guarantee' of sighting ...



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Interestingly, hammerhead sharks were the top species that liveaboard divers said they would like to see, followed by the whale shark and tiger shark.



Despite this increase in shark tourism, there is an increasing concern for sharks populations worldwide. On the Great Barrier Reef, some reef shark populations could be as low as **3-12%** of original sizes in 'general use' areas

Sharks have conservative life-history traits characterised by slow growth rates, late sexual maturity, long gestation periods and give birth to few young. These traits make sharks highly vulnerable to over exploitation. The major threats that currently face sharks globally are overfishing, accidental bycatch and habitat loss.



Photos courtesy of Dr William Robbins

*Much of the Great Barrier Reef tourism research would not be possible without the continued support of the marine tourism industry.*

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