



Stephan lures a great white shark close to the boat to be tagged.

## Hooked on preservation

**PETRO ALBERTS**

Ikamva Fish Processors and Viking Fishing companies opened their hearts and nets to assist Oceans Research with their continuous projects on Great White Sharks in Mossel Bay and fish feeding in The Shark Lab Aquarium at Mossel Bay Point.

Stephan Swanson, Technical Director at Oceans Research, approached the two companies for help. Alan Miller, CEO of Ikamva immediately donated 8 tons of frozen sardines that are being used by Oceans Research as "chum" to attract white sharks to the research vessel. "We prefer using natural products from the sea and the sardines donated have allowed us to go to sea on a daily basis to conduct our surveys", said Swanson. "We are currently looking at the population size and movement patterns of these sharks as well as their hunting strategies on seals around the island. The donated sardines are doing the job and helping Oceans Research to

continue with our very necessary research in the area".

Mr. Miller said that "Ikamva, is the Xhosa word for 'future', and we are happy to have assisted Oceans Research so that we can all respect and understand these charismatic predators". The Ikamva donation will have a vast impact on future white shark research in Mossel Bay and it is encouraging, that even in today's negative economic climate, that a fishing company like this is investing in the future of the oceans and has realised the importance of research.

After "hooking" Ikamva, Mr Swanson "reeled" in Craig Bacon, Director of Viking Fishing who offered to assist with the donation of fish for the feeding at the Shark Lab aquarium and research facility ("the shark lab") at the Point. Mr Bacon was instrumental in procuring approval from the Viking head office in Cape Town for a monthly donation of 20kg fish to feed the

shark lab residents.

"We, at Viking are proud to have a positive influence on the shark lab for the whole of Mossel Bay to enjoy and appreciate", said Mr Bacon. "It has always been one of the major attractions dating back for years and should be maintained for future generations to enjoy".

After one of the worst ever recorded storms that ravaged Mossel Bay in September 2008, destroying the shark lab completely, Oceans Research took the initiative to resurrect it. A proposal was put forward to Mr Albert Wiffen, owner of the buildings and "Big Blue bar and restaurant" for Oceans to take over the management of the shark lab.

"It was sad to see the aquarium destroyed but I'm overjoyed at having the Oceans team on board to bring new life to this very popular landmark in Mossel Bay, said Mr Wiffen. Sharks are captured and then housed at the shark lab for three months during

which time they are studied. After their three month stay they are released back in the ocean at the same spot from where they were captured. Needless to say, food for these 'guests' is vital.

Apart from its popularity with the local community, the shark lab is also an important tourist attraction for both national and international visitors. Despite its small size, the shark lab amazes and captures the interest of many with the kids' playroom, shark documentaries and educational and entertaining tours. Some people have been known to form bonds with certain of the inhabitants at the aquarium and regularly return to monitor their condition and behaviour within their captive environment. With all the time and effort of both the Oceans Research team and the local community, it would indeed be disheartening if everything is flooded again. Therefore it is vital to build retaining doors to prevent future flood damage and before the winter storms start raging. Because of the great expense, the shark lab and Oceans Research are urgently seeking sponsorship or any form of assistance to complete this project.

Ikamva and Viking are investing in marine preservation by continuous monthly donations for which Oceans Research is eternally grateful. We can all help too. Let's all pitch in to preserve the shark lab and help Oceans Research to continue to conduct research on sharks, seals and dolphins.