

Mexico City. December 10, 2019

Dear Ocean Friends, Media Outlets & Mexican Authorities,

It is not my style to get involved in controversial issues, especially when they do not involve me directly. It is also pivotal to specify that I am not writing this letter as one of the owners of the Pelagic Fleet, but as one concerned ocean lover and shark conservationist. The opinions I share below are my own.

For the past couple of months, I have had in my possession some videos that have drawn a lot of attention lately. The first video made public by Arturo Islas Allende, shows a shark getting stuck in one of the cages operated by Nautilus Liveboards, and a second video shows the same shark, motionless, sinking to the bottom of the ocean.

Why didn't I share the videos? For several reasons:

- Both Mike Lever and Nautilus Liveboards are very conscious about conservation, protecting the island, and its sharks. A lot of people do not like Mike Lever as a person and/or as a businessman, and even I have had many disagreements with him along the years, but that doesn't justify using an accident as a personal vendetta against someone.
- Shark tourism is the best way for people to learn, understand, and change their perspective about sharks. It also serves as the means for media outlets to document sharks with their lenses, and share to a broader audience. Cousteau said it best "People protect what they love", and we cannot love something we don't know. Thanks to the boats in Guadalupe, Australia, and South Africa, great white sharks today are one of the few shark species protected world-wide. These boats patrol remote locations, donate large amounts of money to research and conservation, and bring people closer to nature.
- Accidents happen, and blaming only the cages is one of the most ridiculous things I have ever heard. To me, the cage main purpose is to prevent divers from doing stupid things that will endanger themselves amongst one of the top predators in the ocean. There are many more important factors at play that nobody seems to address when something like this happens, like bait handling or a shark's individual personality and behavior. The shark populations have increased significantly in the last 10 years thanks to efforts made by non-profit organizations, governments, and tour operators. Today, instead of observing 150 adult sharks in Guadalupe on any given year, we are watching over 300 individuals during one season, most of them juvenile, and the number increases year after year. Juvenile sharks are bolder, and behave a lot more erratically than the much calmer adult females we were used to before.

- There are few things that bother me more, than someone using tragedy for personal gain. To tell half-truths only to gain fame and popularity, or to get back at someone, is as low as it gets... In this particular case both things happened, and people that call themselves conservationists turned their backs on the species and shared biased information for the sake of spotlight and revenge.
- People that do not know anything about sharks, these types of activities, or how real conservation happens, will lash out against Nautilus, the Mexican Government, and the activity itself. The Government in return, will react to the pressure with excessive regulations or even shutting down cage diving in Guadalupe. In this case, the island will become no-man's land, and paradise to commercial fishing and trophy hunting. Researchers and the National Park will lose most of their funding, and the Guadalupe populations (great white, Guadalupe fur seal, elephant seal, sea lion, yellowtail, bluefin tuna, yellowfin tuna) will be jeopardized.
- There are proper channels to address these issues: Advisory Boards, CONANP, PROFEPA, and the science community. All of these knew about the incident. Each of them are taking the proper measures to investigate any potential wrongdoing and a special commission was formed to avoid future incidents like this one. When public opinion gets involved, it becomes a matter of politics and PR, and bad decisions are made.

I AM NOT justifying the death of a great white shark... it actually breaks my heart into pieces. I have had many conversations with Mike Lever, other boat operators, and the authorities, and I know every single one of them will do whatever they have to do to avoid this from happening again. Running an operation like this is complex, and a constant learning curve, especially when the outside factors change so quickly and dramatically.

I also believe that things could've been better handled after the shark got stuck, but in the end, when an emergency like this happens the crew reacts in the best way they can with what they have. It is really easy to sit back and criticize from the outside. We need to be pragmatic enough to understand that it is not only a matter of safety measures, but also a matter of statistics. Accidents happen anywhere and everywhere.

A lot of you will say that this would've never happened if the cages weren't there to begin with.

To those people, I ask: will sharks be better off without the dive operators?



Jorge Cervera Hauser