

SHARK CRISIS AT THE REUNION ISLAND: CHRONICLE OF A HOLD UP

12th OF AUGUST 2013

- **To Mister Philippe Martin, Minister of Ecology**
- **To Mister Victorin Lurel, Minister for French overseas territories**
- **To Misses Valérie Fourneyron, Minister of sports**
- **To Mister Jean-Luc Marx, Prefect of the Reunion island**
- **To Mister Frédéric Cuvillier, deputy Minister of seas and fishing**

For two years now, the “shark crisis” hitting the Reunion Island has only got worse. Lately it reached its climax.

Summoned by the administrative tribunal to take measures, the Reunion island prefect, Mr Jean-Luc Marx, has unilaterally decided the killing of 90 sharks (45 bull sharks and 45 tiger sharks) under a pretext falsely scientific and just as hypocritical as the “scientific” whale hunting of the Japanese government. The State is thinking of taking out measures of long term “thoughtful regulation” of the shark populations living near the Reunion Island.

How can the Reunion island prefect invoke a **“thoughtful management of stocks”** to justify the killing of these sharks when there is absolutely no study backed up by figures on their population, when their overpopulation in the local environment is biologically unlikely and that, by his own admission, he’s groping along on an uncertain empirical basis. This kind of decision had already been incriminated a year ago by the Institute of Research and Development (IRD) in the trade journal “Pour la science” (For science): “the two species high capacity to travel along the whole coast, and even in the entire Indian Ocean, demonstrates that shark fishing will not only be expensive but also inefficient. The sample takings could even

produce the opposite of the intended effect: the risk is to kill rather coastal sharks allowing more pelagic sharks to prosper, like tiger sharks. Furthermore a drive to hunt sharks down could compromise the CHARC research program". The Reunion island is open on the ocean and will continue to host sharks from the open sea. What is so thoughtful about a blind "regulation" of a specie of which we know the populations on a world scale are sharply dropping? **Who can determine how many sharks need to be killed to ensure the sea users safety? Is the Reunion island going to become a deadly impasse, a Bermuda triangle for the Indian ocean sharks??**

Today, logical reasoning is no longer warranted and we are witnessing a real hold up on this case which concerns us all but has been engulfed by a limited few individuals, hardly representative of the Reunion island's population, rallied behind two surfers associations, also eventually fishers and underwater hunters: **Océan Prévention Réunion (OPR – Ocean Prevention Reunion Island) and Prévention Requin Réunion (PRR – Reunion island Shark Prevention)**. These supporters of shark culls are now the only ones to obtain a listening ear from the State, for puzzling reasons.

Since the beginning of this crisis, the French State is going against the recommendations of its own scientists and the shark specialists unanimous opinion. In the same time it's maintaining the Reunion island's national marine reserve in a silence obligation when it is being publically attacked.

The situation has turned out to be so grotesque that it's now being considered to validate the CAP REQUIN (Objective Shark) project (hunting program). Fishing sharks at State expense (therefore at our expense) is so lucrative for the happy elected politicians that the local fishermen are already defending their patch in the Reunion island's press.

Indeed, the killing of the 90 recently condemned by the prefect sharks is such a windfall that some are already considering letting down all their other activities: "It's far more money making than tuna or swordfish fishing" are we already hearing! It's easy to understand, given the 900 € per shark -destined to rendering (!!)- plus 700 € per fishing trip, 1600 € net total to which must be added the "additional captures". How many French citizens don't even earn such an amount for a month's work!

So it's a blood bath and everyone wants his slice of the pie... The witch hunt is open: 45 bull sharks and 45 tiger sharks –species which **IUCN status is "almost endangered"**- are therefore promised to a certain death. A unilateral decision that reeks medieval times, taken by a prefect confessing he doesn't know where he's going, without any kind of public consultation, without scientific validation and with money that doesn't belong to him. **Everyone knows that the death of these 90 sharks (without counting the accessory takings) will not solve the problem. The shark hunting is therefore more of a sacrificial offering to clientelism**

which lets us question the real development of our so called “civilized” society...

The direction chosen by the State in this case poses grave question in terms of democracy to which we are entitled to obtain answers:

1: Why does the State chose to give credit to the few surfers, fishers and underwater hunters of OPR and PRR when its own scientists – the IRD in charge of the CHARC program and the national marine reserve- state there is no proven shark overpopulation around the island? These same underwater hunters have been expelled from their favorite playground at the creation of the national marine reserve in 2007, which highly questions their impartiality. However the State seems to give them more credit than to his own scientists!

2: Why, as the accident prone conditions and the anthropogenic stimuli that attract sharks near the surfing and bathing zones are long KNOWN (turmoil and/or polluted waters, fresh water inlets, organic rejects in particular fish waste products, deterioration of the coral ecosystem...) don't the State and cities concentrate their efforts on the wastewaters and rain waters treatment, primary and essential conditions for the ecosystem restoration, and also on developing the information and risk prevention tools? Tackling the problem at its roots instead of attacking its symptoms is the only way to figure out a sustainable way out of this crisis.

3: Why doesn't the State clear the national marine reserve of all responsibility when the underwater hunters accuse it of being a pantry for sharks, while the reserve's scientific committee states there is no significant biomass growth (in other words no additional fish) in the marine reserve.

4: Why, when everywhere else (remarkably in Mexico, South Africa, Hawaii, in the Bahamas...) the shark presence, particularly tiger and bull sharks represents a huge economical opportunity for tourism and the diving activities, the surrounding psychosis in the Reunion island, carried out by the OPR and PRR associations and some underwater hunters, manages to block all prospection towards similar solutions? Tourism linked to diving generates yet high profits and benefits far more people than the surf linked tourism.

5: Why, when the Reunion island population has always fundamentally opposed any form of elimination of its sharks and any violation of its marine reserve and while its almost 900 000 inhabitants have never been consulted on such crucial issues, **does the State allow itself to sacrifice its marine heritage for the profit of only a few surfers/ fishers/ underwater hunters rallied behind the OPR and PRR associations** who threaten, insult and frequently call murderers and Nazis the State representatives, elected politicians, IRD scientists, national marine reserve representatives, conservationists, in fact all those who dare to refuse their diktat.

Finally, it is unthinkable that in a State governed by the rule of law, a program like **CAP REQUIN** (Objective Shark) defended by the **OPR** and **PRR** associations (and elaborated by different protagonists of the Reunion island fishing and underwater hunting) which aims the long term destruction of shark populations (by private fishermen) can be funded by the State and therefore by public money. Such a fishing program is based on no scientific logic and goes against common sense and interest. **How can France warrant and fund such a program?**

The catastrophic management of this crisis by the French State is already damaging the Reunion island's image abroad. In the international press, Georges Burgess, renowned shark expert from natural history museum of Florida is already predicting it: **"It's an archaic reaction, a reflex seemingly more motivated by vengeance than science... It'll probably explode in their faces because most of the people visiting the Reunion island have a conservation ethic far more sophisticated than the authorities seem to think"**.

We, undersigned, Reunion island citizens, French citizens, worldwide citizens and associations, demand that the French State reviews its position, motivates its decisions by valid scientific arguments and stops sacrificing the interests of the greatest number of people against the dispensable interests of a few.

An unspoilt marine reserve, a rich and balanced marine ecosystem, a coral reef in good health, this is the common interest, this is the world heritage of humanity that UNESCO chose to classify in 2010, one that will serve the economical, cultural and environmental flourishing of the actual and the future generations. And that will spread the Reunion Island's positive image worldwide. This is what the French State must first and foremost protect. Yet, this is what it is sacrificing!

In 1968, Romain Gary published in Le Figaro his famous **"Letter to an elephant"**. Forty years later these words have never seemed so accurate. A philosophical truth that has today become a scientific and empirical truth. A truth that those who bare the responsibility of taking care of our common interests cannot ignore:

“There is no doubt that, in the name of a radical rationalism, we would have to destroy you in order to occupy all the space on this overcrowded planet. There is no doubt neither that your extinction will be the beginning of a world entirely made for man. But in a world entirely made for man it could well be possible that there be no place for man neither”.

Authors and first signatories of the manifesto



Association for the preservation of Etang Salé les Bains



VAGUES (Waves) ASSOCIATION – REQUIN INTEGRATION (Shark Integration) ASSOCIATION