



By our Marine Biologists at Dolphin-House / Dive college:

Oslob: Where whale sharks are fed to their death.
"Before we eat them, now we feed them".

It is bad enough that there need to be debates whether it is right or wrong to feed wild animals: Whether in Oslob or Tiger Beach, these are attractions for gawkers. The whale sharks found on the east coast of Cebu Island are being fed and put on a show. Local fishermen are made to do the dirty work and many dive centers and tour operators bring in clueless divers who are not provided with the scientific biologic background or the ghastly consequences. In fact the law is clear on this issue: Whoever feeds protected sharks – including whale sharks – violates international and Philippine protection laws. Even the "Behaviour Codex" that was introduced to the feeding atrocity in Oslob does not change anything.

Luckily, the "Cebu Daily News" denounce the gawkers' spectacle repeatedly and report: According to a study by the NGO "Physalus" with daily observations, the whale sharks are still being actively touched with an average of 29 times per hour since the introduction of behaviour rules within the interaction zone. Oslob – and apparently some other areas as well – now have stationary whale sharks, called "regulars" all juvenile males, which are so focused on the feeding that they no longer migrate; thus being lost for reproduction and preservation of the species. It is even worse for the adult sharks which only visit Oslob for a few days. Until this day about 300 different individuals have been identified in Oslob by photo ID. Within 3-4 days the whale sharks learn "Bubbles and Boats = Food". Soon the sharks continue their migration guided by their instinct.

Taking their newly learned behavior with them they approach boats to beg for food and in the process they swim headfirst into rotating propellers or literally offer themselves to be slaughtered by poachers. Cebu, especially the island of Mactan does not only attract divers but has also gained a reputation for shark finning and processing shark fins until this day.

Meanwhile the visitor count in Oslob is slowing down, sadly the whale shark sightings in our region are as well. Along the coast in Moalboal, about 180 Km away from Oslob, the whale sightings have diminished by 80-90%, these consequences are withheld. Our dive center's yearly count of about 40 whale sharks a year, "before Oslob", has been reduced to 3 in the year 2014. All three whale sharks that we encountered came to bump our boats and beg for food. 2015 we had one whale shark encounter. For 2016 also one, the count on Whale shark sightings 2017 is ZERO.

Since the battle to save these amazing gentle giants is lost, the easy money in Oslob and hypocrisy of many dive shops and tour operators stronger than the international and Philippine protection laws to save preserve this highly endangered species there will be no further update from us on this subject.

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