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MEDIA RELEASE

AQUARIUM SHARK RETURNS TO THE OCEAN

Maxine, one of the large female ragged-tooth sharks which has been on display in the Two Oceans Aquarium, will be released back into the oceans today in the vicinity of Struisbaai and Arniston. Scientists will tag her with satellite and ultrasonic tags and will follow her movements for several days after her release. It is hoped that she will migrate with other ragged-tooth sharks to their breeding grounds further up the east coast.

Maxine was removed from the I&J Predator Exhibit on Tuesday morning and placed in a temporary holding pool. This morning she was transferred from this pool via stretcher into a transport tank on board a large truck and was taken by road to Struisbaai. Weighing 190 kilograms and measuring over 2,5 metres from nose to tail, Maxine is in excellent condition.

Before she is released offshore, Dr Malcolm Smale, one of South Africa's leading shark experts, will attach four tags – two ultrasonic coded tags and two pop-up archival satellite tags – to monitor her movements. One of the ultrasonic tags will be removed after the short-term tracking is complete whilst the second will continue to transmit signals for up to two years. If Maxine moves within 300 metres of one of the many receiver base stations positioned along the South African coast, her presence will be recorded when routine downloading is carried out by scientists in these areas. Should she move into diving areas, such as Aliwal Shoal, divers will also be able to report her presence.

The two pop-up satellite tags will gather information on depth, temperature and daylight patterns. These will be set to surface approximately three and six months after her release.

Maxine arrived at the Two Oceans Aquarium eight and a half years ago, having been caught in an angling competition in Struisbaai. Three months prior to this she was trapped in the shark nets off KwaZulu-Natal. Fortunately, she was found alive and was tagged and released by members of the Sharks Board as part of the Oceanographic Research Institute's tagging programme. A faint scar bears testimony to her ordeal.

Her fascinating history and release play a vital role in the Save our Seas Foundation M-Sea Programme (Maxine Science, Education and Awareness Programme). This initiative is driven by the Save our Seas (S.O.S.) Foundation, AfriOceans Conservation Alliance (AOCA) and the Two Oceans Aquarium. With assistance from South Africa's leading shark experts, the M-Sea Programme provides a unique

opportunity to gain much needed scientific information about the lifestyle of ragged-tooth sharks and to raise public awareness of the plight of sharks in general.

It is estimated that over 100 million sharks are being killed world-wide every year. Together with the overexploitation of these animals, negative media and public perception contribute to their precarious status. If sharks are to survive globally, they require support from organisations and individuals who are in a position to change people's perceptions about these maligned creatures.

The public is encouraged to monitor Maxine's journey. Opportunities include teacher workshops at the Two Oceans Aquarium; inserts on the television programme '50/50'; regular updates on the website www.aoca.org.za and competitions to guess the pop-up locations of Maxine's satellite tags. Future projects include a comprehensive one-hour documentary film; educational workshops and packs for coastal schools; a permanent shark information exhibit in the Aquarium and permanent shark information boards erected at key sites along the South African coast.

It is hoped that the efforts of the Save our Seas Foundation M-Sea Programme will bring an extraordinary shark, Maxine, into the lives of all South Africans in an effort to preserve sharks and promote the health of the oceans for future generations. ENDS