



Shark Fishing and Project Management

by Simon Kennish



Do you remember the scene in Jaws, where Quint is sitting watching Chief Brody tie knots in a length of rope?

The fishing reel starts to click slowly as line is taken out by something in the deep, a few clicks, then it stops for a while. Then a few clicks more, another pause – then all hell breaks loose as line streams from the reel.



Well fishing for sharks is just like that in real life too, the moment when you have something on the end of your line and its taking the fishing line off your reel at speed sends a shiver down your spine and the adrenaline starts pumping. That's a feeling you only get from certain things, and for me its shark fishing. The battle begins, but at this point you fight the temptation to strike, the fish needs to swallow the bait, at the moment it's only resting gently in its jaws, so you do nothing other than get ready for it to stop running.

50m goes off the reel in a blistering burst of speed, then 100m, it starts to slow, after 150m the fish stops – you do nothing, fighting the urge to strike, your heart is now pounding with anticipation, will the fish swallow the bait or feel the hook and spit it out????

The line starts to go off the reel again, slowly now, the fish had stopped to turn the bait head first so it could swallow it, now it's swimming off with its tasty snack. However as it swims away, the line is slowly pulling the bait into the corner of its mouth, the hook catches in the scissor of the jaw – as soon as you feel the resistance, now is the time to strike and drive the hook home. **STRIKE**, wait a split second and you will have either just pulled the bait and hook clean out of its mouth, or the hook is set and the next 100m run will commence faster than the first once it realises it been hooked





Line streams off the reel again, now to adjust the drag so as not to snap the line under the pressure. The rod bends as the strain comes on, now you must keep the line taught from here on, if not the fish could shake the hook loose, wrap itself in the line to break it, dive for the bottom to snag it on some rock or a wreck. After the 100m run it slows, you must keep the pressure on, if it swims towards the boat, you must reel the line in as fast as you can, no slack, get as much line back on the reel as you can, before it runs again.

With each run, the fish tires, each run becomes shorter and less frantic, this could go on for 20 minutes or more, if you give the fish a breather it will regain its strength and it starts all over again. The trick is to not bring it onto the boat too quickly, otherwise you will have a major safety issue on deck, the fish needs to be very tired before bringing it onboard. The fight continues, this time as you reel in the line, the fish sees the boat for the first time, another explosive run ensues.



Eventually the fish tires, so do you, your arms ache, your chest muscles scream in pain, but the end is coming. Now to prepare for bringing a 6 foot long fish with razor sharp teeth covered in anticoagulant saliva and skin as rough as sandpaper on board to remove the hook and take a photo.

As you lift the fish onto the back of the boat you need to keep away from the bity end, but also the tail end. These fish can bend in two in the blink of an eye, they can bite their own tail, and that tail is powerful and will whip your skin off in a second. The fish is placed so neither end can do harm, the hook is removed, the trophy photo taken, then it is checked over for any other hooks, and released back into the sea to swim off for another day.



The adrenaline is still flooding your body, hands shake, muscles scream in pain – let's hope that this is only pain you have from your encounter!



Time to check the fishing gear, rebait and try again. That is the pure joy of shark fishing, now what about project management???

Well, fishing for sharks needs a project management approach to be successful, without it you may as well head out to sea, dangle any old hook in the hope that something might be interested – the fishing may be good, but the catching may not be up to much, so let's have a look at what is required from a project management perspective.

Scope – as with all good projects having a defined scope is important, you need to identify what type of shark you want to catch as that will drive all the other decisions. For me its Tope, they grow up to 6 foot in the UK and between 40lb and 70lb they put up a good fight as



a sportfish. They are a protected species in the UK, so they must go back alive, they can live for 40 years, so it's in our interests for them to see another day

Benefits – well for me the adrenaline rush of the fight is a key benefit, it's great to land a Tope but not every strike results in a fish on the deck and not every fishing trip even gets a bite, these are elusive predators and getting very clever by working in pairs to get each other off a line. Some years I land very few fish, others have been much more successful, the hot summer of 2018 was the best for big fish. I also enjoy having a trophy photo taken, proof if nothing else of a good catch. Trying to get the photo can be a challenge in itself. I liken it to holding something like a 55lb sack of potatoes that is wriggling and can take a chunk out of you with one end, or strip the skin from you with the other end, whilst balancing on a wet deck on a wobbly boat – what could possibly go wrong!

Sometimes, there are unexpected benefits, like when the dolphins turn up. Ruins your fishing but great to see them



Planning and time are also key factors in successful shark fishing, you need to know when these fish are in your intended fishing area, they tend to be there for a few months of the year when they follow shoals of bait fish. So planning your fishing trips in these good months is the start, but there is a whole lot more you have to plan in. Tides make a big difference, as does the weather – wind direction and speed will determine which fishing grounds you can get to and stay on for a few hours. Availability of their food source is also key, some years the bait fish don't arrive until later in the summer, other years they come early, depends on the sea temperature and how long and cold the winter has been. Rainfall has an effect, not whilst at sea (apart from making it not very pleasant), but heavy rain in the weeks before can push a lot of river water into the sea and drive the bait fish further out. Then there is the choice of where to fish, the sea is a very large place, so it helps to identify underwater features that will have baitfish, studying the charts is very important, as is talking to other fishermen to see what's being caught where, gather your intelligence.



Also in planning comes the equipment, you need a boat, and unless you are going after Jaws, the phrase '*were going to need a bigger boat*' shouldn't crop up.

You will need something that can go offshore quickly and can handle a rough sea should the weather change. It needs to be equipped with GPS, VHF radio, Echosounder and be big enough for the type of fishing you are planning to do



Quality is very important in shark fishing, this is not a cheap sport, so you need to have the right quality of equipment to give every fish you hook the very best chance of coming onboard. Cut corners on quality and you will lose the fish, and possibly more if you are not careful. The old adage of using the right tool for the job is very true. Starting with the hook, wire trace, leader line, main line, rod, reel etc. They all need to be the right things, the weakest link in this context is truly that. The other key things for quality are the chum and hook bait. Chum is the stuff you see them throwing over the side in Jaws, mashed up fish mixed with other ingredients which drifts on the tide for miles, as soon as a shark crosses this chum trail, it will hopefully follow it all the way to your hook. Good quality here is the difference between ringing the dinner gong or turning their stomach.



Cost as you would expect is very high per fish, both in terms of time and hard cash. Boats are not cheap to own or run, mine has a 5.0 Litre V8 that does 3 MPG if I behave or 1 MPG if I don't. Not to mention purchase cost, maintenance, storage, launching, insurance etc

Fishing tackle for sharks is also not cheap, look at the size of the hooks we use, and even then, we can bend them during the fight. Rods and reels take a pounding, the line needs frequent changes, the wire gets chewed and I have seen a shark bite clean through a 150lb wire trace and casually swim off.





Risks as you can imagine are quite high on my list of things to consider, apart from the obvious ones like falling off the boat, we also have to keep a weather eye out, even the best forecast is just that, and it can and does change rapidly when you are miles offshore. We take sensible precautions as you would expect, lifejackets, flares, VHF radios, mobile phones and battery backups. Less obvious risks include dealing with the fish themselves.

I recall one fish that I brought onboard before it was tired, once on board it wasn't very happy and exploded in a fit of rage whilst I was stood next to it, so I jumped on it like I was riding a horse, this kept me safe and pinned it down so I could remove the hook, no trophy shot for this one, it needed to go back in asap.



While the adrenaline was still flowing I applied some more sun cream..... you could have heard the scream miles away, the shark skin had grazed the inside of both my legs.....aaarrgghh doesn't do it justice. Then again jumping off the boat into the sea was a kneejerk reaction to the pain, not a good idea as:

- the sea was cold
- I had a good chum trail in the water and me thrashing about in it probably wasn't a good move
- The salt water hurt more than the sun cream. Lesson learned, put a towel on a shark before riding it like a horse

Issue management is also a key factor, things do go wrong, and one time when Mrs K said '*don't worry worse things happen at sea*', we were 5 miles offshore – it didn't help.

As with risk management, anticipating what could go wrong means you have a plan for when it does and you have an issue to deal with. If the weather does change, then you need to stop

fishing and head in, painful as it is to give up, trying to deal with a fish on a wildly rolling boat is no laughing matter, it's better to follow the old adage, discretion being the better part of valor and save it for another time.

Finally, it's not all big sharks out there, they all start off as little ones



For me though the look on my face says it all



And I categorically deny I look anything like Quint from Jaws – even with a sharp implement over my head!





Bio Notes - Simon Kennish FRICS, MAPM, MCMI is a Chartered Surveyor, Project and Programme Manager with a passion for delivering major projects and programmes in both the public and private sectors. www.simonkennish.com

He also likes shark fishing – if you havent worked that one out yet!