

**ACTIVITY:** Swimming, carrying perlemoen

**CASE:** GSAF 2004.06.02

**DATE:** Wednesday June 2, 2004

**LOCATION:** The attack took place off Pearly Beach Western Cape Province, South Africa.

**NAME:** Nkosinathi Mayaba

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 21-year-old male from Gansbaai.



## BACKGROUND

**MOON PHASE:** Full Moon, June 3, 2004

**ENVIRONMENT:** Pearly Beach is the closest shore to Dyer Island, which has a breeding colony of jackass penguins, and Geysers Rock with its breeding colony of Cape fur seals. The channel between the two islands has been dubbed “Shark Alley” because of the large population of white sharks that patrol the edges of its kelp beds. There are currently eight white shark tour operators in Gansbaai, dubbed ‘the white shark cage diving capital of the world’ due to the abundance of white sharks in the area. The swim from Pearly Beach to Shark Alley takes three hours each way, but poachers make the swim because of the abundance of perlemoen (abalone) in Shark Alley. Craig Spencer, chief conservationist for the Overberg, said the poachers swim out to dive, rather than going by boat, to avoid the newly established marine anti-poaching and conservation unit.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 400 metres

**TIME:** 15h00

**NARRATIVE:** Mayaba was one of eight poachers. The men swam from Pearly Beach to Shark Alley and were returning to shore when the attack took place. “I was three metres away, the closest to the guy,” said one of the poachers known as Saider. “I saw [the shark] bite his leg. He shouted for help. I said, 'stab it'. The shark pulled him under, then pushed him straight up again. His leg was off. Then he was swimming behind me, surrounded by blood. I was scared of him now, because I thought other sharks would sense the blood and come. Three of us swam away. Then I saw him on his back, swimming slowly. We didn't see him again.”

Another witness, Lunga Molouri, told police he had been diving in the Pearly Beach area with the missing man when the incident took place. He said he had been emerging from the water when he turned to check on his diving companion and saw a large white shark grab hold of him, and saw the shark shaking the man violently before disappearing beneath the waves still grasping the man between its jaws. (According to Molouri, the incident supposedly involved a middle-aged victim — could there have been two attacks?)

After the attack, the poachers dropped their spoils so as to reach shore as quickly as possible. They reported the attack and police divers from Paarl were called in to assist in recovery efforts.

**INJURY:** Fatal. The man's body was found by a member of the public on Sunday evening

at Quoin Point, 15 kilometres east of Pearly Beach.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The incident was thought to involve a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*.

**COMMENTS:** When a shark attacks a human it tends to bite, then let go. But in this case there was evidence of "extensive feeding", according to Natal Sharks Board research director Jeremy Cliff who examined photographs of the man's body. "It looks as if he lost one arm, and there's some damage on his torso too. Both femurs are exposed."

Perlemoen poaching, often organized by gangs, is rife in the area, and is a major headache for conservation authorities. A 53-year-old Gansbaai man was arrested in Swellendam on Saturday [June 5, 2004] when traffic police found about 8200 abalone valued at R600,000 in his vehicle.

**SOURCES:** Natal Sharks Board; Cape Times, June 11, 2004, et al.