



# Tuna Research and Conservation Center

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February 4, 2002

Dr. Rosalind Cotter  
Nature  
The Macmillan Building  
4 Crinan St,  
London N1 9XW  
United Kingdom

Dear Dr. Cotter,

This letter is in reply to the charge submitted to you by Mr. Sean Van Sommeran concerning our recent paper in Nature, Expanded Niche for White Sharks, 2002, 415: 35-36.

We disagree that an erratum is warranted. Mr. Van Sommeran asserts that he should have been acknowledged as a contributor and co-author. First, we did not acknowledge any contributions or assistance as your policy prohibits acknowledgments in the "Brief Communication" section. As a matter of course, we acknowledge all financial, physical and intellectual assistance when permitted and appropriate. If your policy had permitted acknowledgement of those who helped us tag the white sharks, Mr. Van Sommeran would have been one of several people we would have included. Second, Mr. Van Sommeran did nothing to justify being a co-author on this paper and none of us ever agreed from the onset to have him as a co-author on the paper.

Here is additional background detail, if you require it.

**The complaintif.** Mr. Van Sommeran runs a small-scale enterprise in Santa Cruz with the title, Pelagic Shark Research Foundation (PSRF). PSRF enjoys tax-free status but has no laboratories, no offices, no paid staff, and is run solely by Mr. Van Sommeran. He has no college degree and has a reputation within the academic community of misrepresenting and exaggerating his role in research projects where he has been a paid assistant for driving a boat. His income is derived from donations to his foundation and welfare checks. He does not publish research papers.

**Instrument gift.** While Scott Davis did work with PSRF in the past, he was a graduate student at UCSC during this study. The entire time during the field operations Mr. Davis retained his graduate student status and the use of this affiliation is appropriate in the paper. The study involved deployment of ten pop-up satellite tags in 1999 and 2000, of which, six were successful at delivering data. Dr. Block provided seven of the tags to the project. Dr. Pyle provide one tag and Mr. Davis received a gift of two instruments to facilitate his studies from the PSRF. The donations for the two "PSRF" tags were routed through PSRF which provided a tax write-off for the donors. Mr. Davis agreed upon receiving the donations to acknowledge the gift in future publications where appropriate. There was never any agreement that the

transfer of the financial gift of the tags from PSRF entitled the "foundation" or Mr. Van Sommeran to be a co-author on the research.

**Respective roles.** Co-authors Pyle, Anderson, Boustany and Block worked together to attach two of the tags to sharks at the Farallon Islands in 1999. This research preceded any involvement of Mr. Davis, a graduate student of Le Boeuf. Mr. Pyle, Anderson and Boustany attached four tags at the Farallon Islands in 2000 and Mr. Davis attached four of the instruments to sharks at the Farallones and at Año Nuevo in 2000. When the two tags were attached at Año Nuevo, Mr. Van Sommeran piloted the boat to the site. He made no other contribution to the collection of data, analysis of data, writing or editing of this paper. He was paid by Mr. Davis for his services or Mr. Davis provided his share of the logistical expenses for the day on the water. Satellite uplink time was paid for by Dr. Block and Mr. Davis. Data analysis was conducted by Block, Boustany and Davis. Block and Le Boeuf provided additional financial support during the data analysis period and supervised drafting of the manuscript.

**Erroneous claims by Mr. Van Sommeran.** PSRF bought no satellite time. PSRF did not conduct any fieldwork for this study at Año Nuevo; they were paid to drive a boat to assist Mr. Davis who tagged two of the sharks. The federal permit for tagging sharks at Año Nuevo bore Mr. Davis's name. PSRF did not initiate this study. Dr. Block initiated the study independent of PSRF and Mr. Van Sommeran with Mr. Pyle, Anderson and Boustany in 1999. Dr. Block was not aware that Mr. Van Sommeran had any association with the project until after the paper was accepted by Nature and he voiced concerns. Mr. Van Sommeran was never present at any of the meetings discussing the project plans, the data analysis or the deployment preparations. The tagging techniques used in this study were not developed by PSRF staff. Dr. Block's lab supervised all aspects of the satellite tagging via harpoon, and the techniques associated with attracting white sharks to the vessel have been used for two decades by various investigators, and especially by co-authors Pyle and Anderson, at the Farallones. There was no agreement that PSRF would continue to associate with Mr. Davis once he was admitted to graduate school at the University of California, Santa Cruz, or that he would continue to be obligated in some undefined way to PSRF. Mr. Davis was a graduate student at UCSC when the data for this study were collected. PSRF never provided the University of California at Santa Cruz with "an avenue that otherwise did not exist".

Thus, the only issue that remains a concern is the lack of acknowledgement for the assistance for driving the boat used during the tagging procedures at one of the locations used by the researcher project, and the funding of two tags. This omission was due to the Nature policy of not permitting acknowledgements. We indicated to Mr. Van Sommeran prior to publication that this policy was Nature's policy, and not ours, and informed him of our plans to publish a second paper with a more complete data set, acknowledging his helpful assistance with the boat driving and the foundations financial contribution to two tags.

Sincerely,

Burney Le Boeuf and Barbara A. Block