

## **Blancpain shares the behind-the-scenes of the first Tamataroa mission, a collaborative project conducted by the Gombessa team and the Mokarran Protection Society**

**Supported by Blancpain, the Tamataroa project (the local name of the Great Hammerhead Shark in French Polynesia), is a three-year initiative with the objective of studying the ecology of this endangered species – in order to initiate protection protocols in French Polynesia and along the shark’s migratory routes. Blancpain unveils a series of video blogs created by Laurent Ballesta and the Gombessa team, who joined forces with the Mokarran Protection Society headed by Jean-Marie Jeandel. Two major additional expeditions will follow, which will take place in 2022 and 2023, respectively.**

In 2014, Marc A. Hayek became a certified technical diver. At the end of his last test dive to achieve the certification, a massive Great Hammerhead Shark (*Sphyrna mokarran*) suddenly appeared from the deep, and whilst passing through the close vicinity of Mr. Hayek, there was a brief exchange of eye contact. This intense moment of welcome, by an animal considered the guardian of the pass by the locals, profoundly touched Blancpain's President & CEO.

It became inconceivable to him that this encounter could be the last, especially considering that this mysterious and quite elusive species is listed on the IUCN's Red List as endangered worldwide, with a decreasing population and a very high risk of extinction. As a result, Blancpain, and Marc A. Hayek on a personal level, decided to take action.

The first step was to support the creation of a local association – the Mokarran Protection Society (MPS) – to focus on the study of the current situation in French Polynesia; the area is a crucial region for this species but knowledge of the Great Hammerhead's ecology is extremely limited. The first two observation and research missions of the Mokarran Protection Society have brought forth the necessary data to motivate and support a much more ambitious three-year project conducted together with Laurent Ballesta and his Gombessa Expeditions team.

This consortium, brought together by Blancpain, will benefit from the scientific expertise of renowned shark specialists from the US, Europe, and Australia. This was also the case during the Gombessa IV expedition, which generated an impressive number of scientific findings, including the revelation, for the very first time, of a collaborative hunting behavior for the grey reef sharks. The prominent *700 Sharks into the Dark* documentary film has received more than 70 international awards, which also included nomination for the Emmy Awards.

The intention of the new project, Tamataroa, is to generate knowledge, understanding and awareness. Furthermore, it hopes to deliver a concrete management tool for the regional and international authorities enabling them to provide effective protection of the *Sphyrna mokarran* in French Polynesia and other regions, as this is a highly migratory species. It will also provide a major contribution to the world acoustic detection network, as well as innovative research protocols for the study of this and other shark species.