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Article rank | 12 Apr 2014 | Daily Dispatch | By DAVID MACGREGOR | Senior Reporter

Fears grow for Port St Johns holiday bathers

Shark attacks fail to scare off swimmers

FEARS have been raised for the safety of hundreds of people who are expected to flock to Port St Johns over the Easter weekend following a deadly shark attack three weeks ago.



KEEP OUT! A flag warns Second Beach bathers after an Austrian tourist was killed in a shark attack there recently
Picture: MIKE LOEWE

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Despite a 72-year-old Austrian tourist recently being mauled to death in the surf at Second Beach, swimming at this popular site continues.

With eight fatal attacks in five years and the spot being dubbed the "beach of death", calls have been made for urgent action to be taken to prevent further incidents. Although proposals for shark nets and baited drum lines have been investigated in a Natal Sharks Board (NSB) report to government, the best solution appears to be a tidal pool. This, however, is a long-term intervention and feasibility studies still have to be carried out. Local Mayor Mnyamezeli Mangqo yesterday said that although he was concerned for the safety of swimmers, it was virtually impossible to ban bathing.

Mangqo said an awareness day would be held next Thursday – the day before the Easter Weekend. "You

can't just say people can't swim, you must encourage them to enjoy nature outside the water."

Outspan Inn owner Kathryn Costello blamed the shark attacks on serious infrastructure and filth issues and said the 50odd local tourism establishments were suffering hugely.

"We don't get much tourism anymore, we survive on corporate guests." Others relied "on hardcore adventure tourists".

She said family tourism was dead and warned that something needed to be done urgently. Claims that the government would react more decisively if the attacks happened elsewhere were denied by Department of Environmental Affairs communications director Zolile Nqayi.

"We are alive to the situation in PSJ [Port St Johns] and have committed our resources to finding a workable solution."

He said research revealed the nearby Umzimvubu River was a nursery for Zambezi sharks, who breed and feed in the area.



Although an NSB report on the recent death has not been completed, operations head Mike Anderson-Reade believed it was a Zambezi shark because of the close proximity to the shore and the violence of the attack. Rhodes University ichthyology head Dr Peter Britz urged bathers in the area not to venture into the sea beyond knee deep. — davidm@dispatch.

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