ATAP NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2025

Greetings everyone

Welcome to Issue 2 of our biannual ATAP Newsletter! We're so pleased to know that the first issue was well received; thanks to those that took the time to let us know. As always, transparency and open communication is very important to us to ensure that our wonderful network keeps functioning efficiently, and to ensure that you are happy.

The second half of the year has been both busy and trying, with lots of student deliverables, students wrapping up their theses, funding application submissions, conferences a-plenty, and so much more. But, there is only one way to eat an elephant, and that is a bite at a time! We also saw the ATAP team grow by one, welcoming Dinah Mukhari who has joined the ATAP for the next three years as a Research Infrastructure Professionals Programme postdoctoral fellow.

A massive shout out, as always, to our funders for their ongoing support, and to you, our dedicated deployment partners and platform users. Without all the support, we wouldn't be able to maintain our nationwide array. Thank you!

If you ever have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to either myself or Matt. We are here to make sure you get the best out of the platform to meet your movement ecology research needs. Let's keep tracking, not slacking.

Happy tracking, and be safe.

Taryn & Matt

about ATAP

The ATAP, formalised in October 2011, is Africa's largest passive acoustic receiver array, spanning 2 300 km of the southern African coastline. The data collected by the ATAP not only contributes to knowledge on the movement ecology of many of our important coastal fishery species, but by being incorporated into the development of, or existing management plans will help contribute to the sustainability of these species.

Taryn Murray releasing an acoustically tagged spotted grunter in the Port of Ngqura. © Vivienne Dames

Obituary: Joshua Frachet

On 27th August 2025, we lost one of our own – Joshua Frachet. He was a passionate individual, driven, caring, hardworking, and always willing to lend a helping hand to absolutely anything ongoing. In his short 22 years, he probably saw more tagging take place than any other student, having assisted with tagging of bronze bream, dusky kob, silver kob, white sharks, lesser guitarfish, and spotted gully sharks, let alone the receivers he helped rollover both at sea at in the estuaries. A man full of life; in fact, living his best life. The impact he had on so many people's lives is truly remarkable. You may be gone, Frachet, but you will never, ever be forgotten. Snot dolphins for life.

ATAP overview

The ATAP network, maintained by a group of dedicated deployment partners, including Reel Science Co., Shark Spotters, South African Shark Conservancy, Marine Dynamics, Oceans Research Institute, South African Environmental Observation Network Elwandle Node, KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board, Rhodes University, Oceanographic Research Institute and SharkLife, currently comprises **301 receivers** (models 69 kHz, VR2W and VR2AR, Innovasea, Canada) distributed from St Helena Bay in the Western Cape, South Africa, through to Santa Maria in southern Mozambique (Figure 1). Further, CapeNature assists with the retrieval and deployment of receivers around the De Hoop Marine Protected Area and adjacent region, Barry Skinstad assists with receivers deployed in Plettenberg Bay, and South African National Parks assists with receivers deployed in the Knysna Estuary. Your ongoing support and assistance is so appreciated!

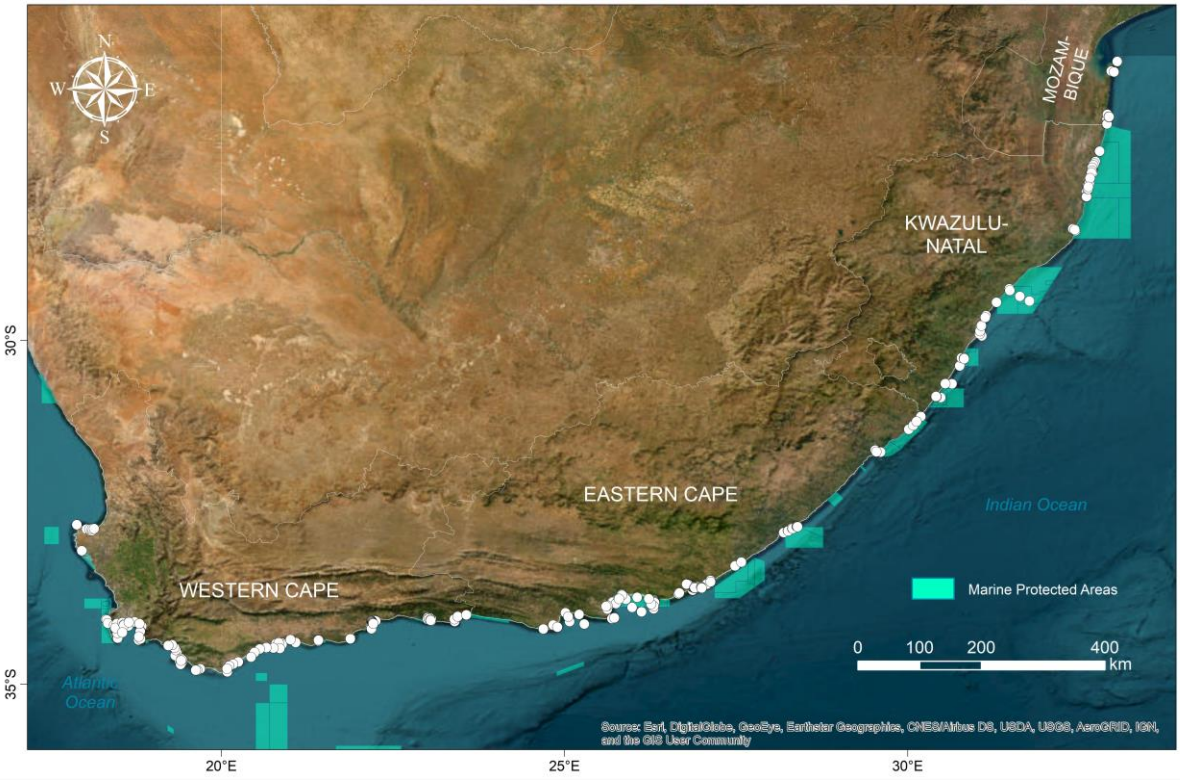

Figure 1: The current receiver (white dots) network forming South Africa's Acoustic Tracking Array Platform, covering approximately 2300 km of the coastline.

Currently, the ATAP detects the movements of **46 species** (13 fishes, 18 sharks, 11 rays, 1 skate, 3 turtles), with at least 980 active acoustic transmitters in the water. To date, more than **30.5 million individual detection points** have been recorded, representing a significant amount of movement data! Additionally, many datasets have matured and/or are complete. If you are unsure how much data have been collected on your tagged animals, please do reach out (TS.Murray@saiab.nrf.ac.za), and we will happily put a data report together for you. If you have a preferred format in which you would like your data, please feel free to request this too, and we will try our best to meet your needs (e.g. formatted for VTrack and easy import into R).

Tagging: 01 Jun ‘25 to 30 Nov ‘25

Tagging has been slightly slower during the second half of the year (01 June to 30 November 2025) which is generally expected due to tagging mostly slowly down during the cooler autumn and winter months. Having said that, a few research teams have continued to tag away, including the Southern African Fisheries Ecology Research Lab at Rhodes University, Ryan Daly at the Oceanographic Research Institute, and SAIAB in the Port of Ngqura. Altogether, 45 individuals from eight species were tagged, including scalloped hammerhead sharks (1), silver kob (15), spotted gully sharks (2), spotted grunter (10) (Figure 3), blue stingray (5) (Figure 3) and giant kingfish (5), with a new species added to the list of those previously and currently monitored by the ATAP, namely couta *Scomeromorus commerson* (6; Figure 2) and short-tail stingray *Bathytoshia brevicaudata* (1).

Figure 2: Bruce Mann with a landed couta tagged and released in southern Mozambique (© Ryan Daly).

Figure 3: Taryn Murray releasing an acoustically tagged grunter in the Port of Ngqura in August 2025 (© Vivienne Dames) (left), and Taryn Murray tagging a blue stingray in the Knysna Estuary with the assistance of Chantel Elston (© Jessica Morrison) (right).

ATAP/Save Our Seas Foundation Transmitter Grant

For the past 10 years (skipped 2018), the ATAP, together with the Save Our Seas Foundation, has been awarding a small transmitter grant to study elasmobranchs with the ATAP array (Figure 4). We're happy to, once again, be able to offer the transmitter grant in 2025, with this year seeing three applications being submitted. This year's successful recipient is Bruce Mann, who will be looking to tag juvenile raggedtooth sharks in the Port Alfred area at a known nursery site. All the best for your project, and we, along with the fantastic SAFER Lab array, look forward to collecting detection data on your animals when they are tagged.

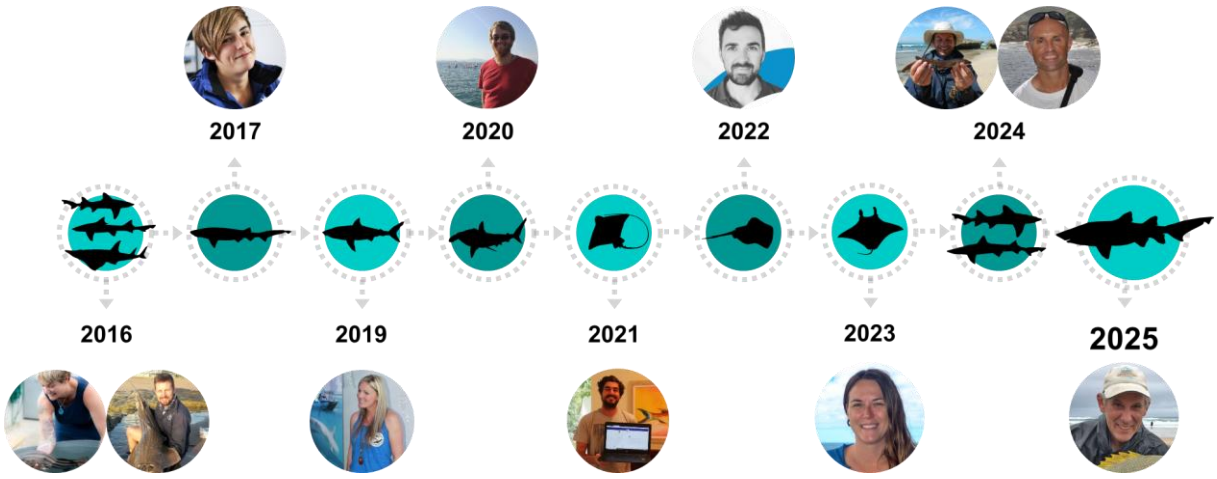

Figure 4: We, together with Save Our Seas Foundation, are supporting our ninth small transmitter grant. This timeline shows all past recipients, year of award and species studied.

And then there were three:
Dinah Mukhari

We're immensely proud to have Dinah Mukhari join the ATAP team for the next three years as a postdoctoral fellow. Being no stranger to acoustic telemetry, Dinah used active tracking to monitor the movements of common carp *Cyprinus carpio* in Groenvlei Lake during her MSc, and moved across to passive tracking to study the residency and connectivity of flathead mullet *Mugil cephalus* in the Kowie Estuary. We're excited to see what the next three years hold, especially with an extra pair of hands on the ATAP team. Welcome Dinah!

All the conferences…

It has quite a busy second half of the year in terms of conference attendance (Figure 5). The **7th International Conference on Fish Telemetry** took place in Traverse City, USA in June 2025. Dr Taryn Murray, Dr Chantel Elston and Dinah Mukhari attended, all delivering full oral presentations, and ensuring that South Africa was well represented in the annual country singing competition. Next up, the **8th Southern African Shark and Ray Symposium** in Makhanda in September 2025. Not only was this the first time that this symposium has ever been hosted in the Eastern Cape, and had delegates from 12 different countries, but was also organised by Taryn and Dr Rhett Bennett (for their stupidity or sins, we're still deciding). With a dedicated session on movement ecology, several ATAP users (researchers and students) presented work using data collected by the ATAP. It's fantastic seeing datasets slowly mature and the interpretation of the collected data. Finally, Taryn attended the **13th Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association Symposium** held in Mombasa, Kenya at the end of September to the beginning of October. A special session, co-hosted by Taryn and Dr Jérôme Bourjea at WIOMSA, was also used to start the conversation around the idea of a more regional telemetry network, something akin to the European Tracking Network where multiple countries can share tagging metadata and detection data to facilitate multinational collaborations.

Figure 5: Group photograph of all conference delegates who attended the 8th Southern African Shark and Ray Symposium in September 2025 (top); Dinah Mukhari and Taryn Murray jet setting to Traverse City, USA for the 7th International Conference on Fish Telemetry (bottom left) and the SAIAB/Rhodes University affiliated delegates at the 13th WIOMSA Symposium in Mombasa, Kenya.

OTN survey on open data

OCEAN TRACKING NETWORK

The Ocean Tracking Network's International Data Management Committee is conducting a short **anonymous survey** to gather global perspectives on researcher perceptions and barriers to **data sharing** and **open-access data**. This online survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Interested participants are asked to only complete the survey once.

The survey can also be accessed here: OTN IDMC Survey on Telemetry Data.

Creature feature

Every newsletter, we'll be doing a creature feature, focusing on one tagged species currently being monitored by the ATAP. In this issue, who better to highlight than the Old Man of the Sea – the **black musselcracker *Cymatoceps nasutus*** AKA poenskop. This South African endemic has an interesting life history. Firstly, it is amongst the oldest sparid species, reaching up to 45 years of age. Secondly, it is a protogynous hermaphrodite, being born female, only maturing at 10 years of age, and then changing sex at 17 years. Some genetic work suggests that at least two populations exist along the South African coastline, and dart tagging information has identified extreme residency (with the odd mover, of course).

To date, 15 individuals have been tagged between 2018 and 2025 along the Wild Coast, from the Amathole MPA off Kei Mouth to the Pondoland MPA, giving researchers a really great idea of the efficacy of these MPAs for this important recreationally important species. Of these, five have been detected, together accumulating 148964 detections. While the data are overwhelmingly supporting their known long-term residency, there have been some interesting and surprising movements! More to come…

Innovasea information

The ATAP exclusively comprises equipment from Innovasea, a Canadian-based manufacturer, formerly known as VEMCO. There has been some confusion over the past year about Innovasea's changes and what this means for the current array. First of all, Innovasea is using the term "Gen 2" for both the new receiver firmware that was released in March 2023, as well as the new code spaces for transmitters. Almost all receivers in the ATAP have been updated to Gen 2 firmware. This is not the same as the NexTrak receivers.

The new Gen 2 code spaces are 2801 for pinger tags, and 2951 for sensor tags. Researchers using these new code spaces **must use Fathom to offload receivers**. VUE does not display/export these new code space detections. If a researcher has an older receiver like the VMT, VR100-200, VR2C, VR3-UWM or VR4-Global, the tags programmed with this new code space will not be detected.

For more information related to Innovasea and their equipment, please contact Dr Enrico Gennari (e.gennari@oceans-research.com) or Tilana Steyn (sales@oceans-research.com).

The blue stingrays proved elusive in the Knysna Estuary this October. Here, a pregnant female sits calmly in the soft sediment. © Jessica Morrison

Ways to help the ATAP

The ATAP, being funded by several different funding bodies and institutions, is always expected to report on various activities. For these deliverables, we're required to submit information related to different projects (without giving away any of the details) as well as provide photographs related to fieldwork activities. As such, there are a number of ways that you, as an ATAP user, can assist! Any of the following things will help us greatly when it comes to reporting:

1. Please ensure you **send** us updated tagging **metadata** and/or deployment metadata **soon after the fieldwork** has taken place. In this way, we're able to keep better track of your animals for you, as well as the array.
2. Send through a couple of **photographs related to fieldwork activities**. These can include animals being tagged, close ups of tagged animals, retrievals and deployments of receivers. All photographs will be fully acknowledged, and will remain the property of the person who took the photograph.
3. Please share any **ideas** you may have **for blog posts or social media posts**. We are always more than happy to share the incredible work you're doing!
4. Please **let us know if your project has done something interesting** whether it be interesting results, something interesting you saw in the field, anything. We'd love to hear! Anything related to points 1 to 3 can be emailed through to Taryn Murray at TS.Murray@saiab.nrf.ac.za.
5. Because of our successful NEP award, we're going to be expected to keep up with the **platform user forms**. These will, however, be digital in nature and will be controlled via a platform on NRF Connect (the National Research Foundation's portal controlling funding applications). While we realise that these can be incredibly frustrating to complete, we would be most appreciative if you could take the five minutes it takes to complete these forms. We can't thank you enough for your support here.
6. **Please remember to acknowledge the ATAP** in any publications/outputs stemming from data collected by the platform. We have a standard acknowledgement clause that we are more than happy to share with you.