

## One welfare in aquariums! – A sustainability tale



Photo Credit- Researcher's Own

The Megalodon sharks, Caribbean monk seals and the Great Auk used to happily swim in the Oceans before they became extinct. The threat of extinction has become a reality for several animals such as African penguins, turtles, and coral reefs. The extinction of marine animals has been attributed to irresponsible human activities such as, overfishing, pollution and tourism activities that interfere with the breeding and natural evolution of marine life. It is apparent that if humans continue to be irresponsible, marine wildlife and marine biodiversity will become history. The concept of one welfare states that animal welfare and environmental sustainability is influenced by human behaviour and puts the responsibility of preserving the marine ecosystem on humans.

Historically, aquariums have been labelled as the 'bad guys' caging, restricting, and messing with the natural way of life of marine wildlife. There is a belief that aquariums exist for the contentment of tourists at the detriment of sea animals. But then, what if they are not the bad guys and are taking the responsibility of preserving marine wildlife for the future generations? To understand aquariums better, the researcher explored sustainability practices in an aquarium and how they contribute to the sustainability of marine animals and environment.

A research study carried out by Kudzai Chipangura, a [master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#) addressed the gap in literature on the sustainability practices in aquariums. The study explored the sustainability practices at the Two Oceans Aquarium, and unpacked the barriers impeding implementation, the impacts these have on the marine environment and the methods used to communicate with tourists on sustainability.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews from nineteen employees in various departments at Two Oceans Aquarium. The findings revealed that sustainability practices at Two oceans aquarium include the use of solar power, recycling, and beach clean-up campaigns. Employee apathy and lack of interest were some of the barriers revealed by the findings. The findings also revealed the effects of sustainability practices on the marine environment as being rehabilitation and release of endangered turtles through their turtle rehabilitation centre and seal disentanglement programme ensuring the thriving of the species. Communication to tourists was found to be done through staff, interactive signage and through social media and blogs.

It is envisaged that the findings of this study will guide aquariums on improving sustainability practices to ultimately protect marine biodiversity. The findings would also guide organisations' policy formulation on resource conservation, recycling, and proper waste disposal to protect the marine ecosystem. We posit that future research should focus on measuring the impact of sustainability practices as well as investigate and measure how education and awareness influences intentional sustainable behaviour in tourists and the community.

*This research was conducted as part of the fulfilment of the [master's degree](#) in Tourism Management in 2023 with the [Department of Marketing Management](#) by Kudzai Chipangura under the supervision of [Dr Felix Bello](#).*