

MANAGEMENT OF SHARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES WATERS

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Surf Life Saving NSW Submission
Inquiry into Management of Sharks in New South Wales Waters

*Submitted to: Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development
Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000.*

Introduction

Surf Life Saving NSW (SLSNSW) would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit a paper into this Inquiry.

In this submission we would like to draw the Committee's attention to the impact that shark attacks and sightings have on Surf Life Saving services by placing higher demands on our operations. Whilst surf lifesavers are always vigilant, our lifesavers have gone above and beyond their normal volunteer duties to protect beach goers over the winter period. SLSNSW would like the NSW Government to recognise the outstanding work of our volunteer lifesavers, particularly across the North Coast and Far North Coast, who have done an incredible job throughout Winter responding to shark sightings and assisting members of the general public and other emergency services where required.

SLSNSW recognises that shark incidents are an ongoing concern in the community and for the tourism industry, but believe it is important to inform and not alarm people. SLSNSW would like to see greater emphasis on providing information about sharks that complements existing water safety messages and educates the community about swimming at patrolled beaches. This is the most simple and effective way to enhance the level of safety we are able to provide visitors to our beaches as it provides supervision and surveillance.

Background of Surf Life Saving NSW

Who we are

Since 1907, Surf Life Saving has been committed to saving lives and is Australia's major water safety, drowning prevention and rescue authority. Surf Life Saving is the largest volunteer movement of its kind in Australia and it continues to grow.

SLSNSW is made up of 129 Surf Life Saving Clubs, 11 Branches and 77,000 members. Since recording began in 1949, our volunteers have performed over 355,000 rescues.

Last season our lifesavers watched over 7.1 million people who visited NSW beaches. Our lifesavers carried out 5,902 rescues, 138,775 preventative actions and 9,199 first aid cases.

Why we exist

To save lives, create great Australians and build better communities.

The impact of shark attacks on Surf Life Saving NSW

Following the shark attacks this year and increased sightings of sharks, there have been heightened demands on our lifesaving services out of our patrolling season. As our patrolling season didn't start until Saturday, 19th September (start of the NSW School holidays) there was a considerable drain on our volunteer resources over the winter break, which is typically the quieter time of the year for our lifesavers.

With the increased number of shark sightings, it resulted in increased callouts through our Emergency Response System. In the Far North coast area between July and the end of September, our Emergency Response System received 53 callouts, compared to 4 at the same time last year, which is an increase of 1225%.

These callouts have a significant impact on our support services such as jet skis and offshore rescue boats, and have resulted in a number of our SLSCs and volunteers in the Far North Coast area paying expenses out-of-pocket to cover fuel and operational costs with the increased requests for our services out of patrol season.

There have also been increased demands on lifesavers and other SLSNSW personnel to respond to escalating enquiries from the media; and calls from the general public. Furthermore a significant amount of time has been taken up attending meetings, community consultations and attending the Shark Summit. The extra duties our volunteers have taken on over winter have resulted in a considerable drain on our personnel and resources.

Measures and strategies being undertaken by Surf Life Saving NSW to prevent attacks by sharks

Patrolling beaches ensuring supervision and surveillance

The primary role of Surf Life Saving is to save lives at the beach. One of the most effective ways that SLSNSW protects beachgoers is to patrol beaches and SLSNSW does this across 129 SLSCs, through our support services and our Emergency Response System. The simplest safety measures that members of the general public can follow is to only swim at patrolled beaches and swim between the red and yellow flags. This is the best place to swim because lifesavers and lifeguards are able to monitor all risks to maximise the safety of swimmers.

Over the last two years through the Department of Primary Industries, Observations Towers Funding Grant, SLSNSW has distributed every SLSC in NSW with a loud hailer and water resistant binoculars. The binoculars are a vital piece of equipment for NSW lifesavers to effectively spot sharks, increasing the safety and awareness for the beach attending public. With the majority of NSW beach goers swimming between the flags, the benefits of early shark detection and notification is maximised. In some case where the resources are there, patrolled beaches may also sound a shark alarm which notifies the general public to leave the water as soon as it is sounded.

Community Education

Beachsafe

SLSNSW recommends that Government authorities, the media and tourism industry actively promote to visitors that they visit www.beachsafe.org.au for all beach safety information. There is information available on the website in 30 languages and the website can direct swimmers to the nearest patrolled beach. Visitors to the website can view fact sheets on rips, bluebottles and other hazards in different languages. Visitors can also download the Beachsafe Application on their smartphones, which provides access to patrol locations and hours; and real-time weather and surf conditions, anywhere along the coast.

Coastal Accommodation Network

SLSNSW encourages accommodation providers to join our Coastal Accommodation Network so they can pass on important beach safety information to their guests to help them stay safe when swimming along our coastline. Our Coastal Accommodation Network links accommodation providers throughout the state with Surf Life Saving to achieve the following:

- To raise beach safety knowledge and awareness among visitors to coastal locations
- To reduce the incidence of rescues among visitors to coastal locations
- To reduce the incidence of drowning among visitors to coastal locations

SLSNSW has recently introduced a Coastal Accommodation Network e-newsletter. This e-newsletter is an initiative of SLSNSW to provide accommodation providers with updates that are timed to coincide with each school holiday period. This newsletter includes surf safety resources and information on safety signs so guests are 'beach ready' and know what the different warning signs mean.

Surfers Rescue 24/7 – First Aid and CPR

In 2012 Surf Life Saving NSW partnered with Surfing NSW to provide the CPR component of their *Surfers Rescue 24/7* program. Through the NSW Government's Water Safety Black Spot Fund, Surfing NSW obtained funding to give all surfers in NSW the opportunity to do a CPR and Board Rescue Course. To date, Surf Life Saving NSW has conducted 65 courses and trained 1,612 surfers who now have a nationally recognised Statement of Attainment to perform CPR. This program has been vital in training board riders CPR/first aid skills, which will prevent a number of tragedies along the NSW and has already done so.

SharkSmart Program

SLSNSW and the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) recently launched the 'Shark Smart' campaign, which has seen information distributed to every Surf Life Saving Club (SLSC) from the Mid North Coast extending through to the QLD border. These resources have been made available to the public as well as coastal accommodation providers. These resources contain safety tips and advice from the DPI and is intended to reassure visitors to our beaches.

SLSNSW has played a key role in providing community education through the SharkSmart program. Since October 2015, SLSNSW has distributed nearly 7,500 stickers and flyers; and 2,500 posters to all our Surf Life Saving Clubs from the Hunter through to the Far North Coast, along with accommodation providers from Sydney up towards the North Coast. (*Please see Appendix for copies of these resources*). In addition to the printed material, these resources are also available online for accommodation providers to download from the DPI website: <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/info/sharks/tips-to-reduce-your-risk-of-shark-attack>

Working with key stakeholders

SLSNSW and our volunteers have been actively involved with other stakeholders and provided input at the Shark Summit and also at the Ballina Shark Advisory Committee meetings to assist in providing a multi-agency response with the NSW Government, the DPI, local councils and the CSIRO.

SLSNSW continues to liaise with the DPI and through our representatives on Local and Emergency Committees to ensure we are able to undertake a long term strategic approach to mitigate shark incidents and to gather the information to deliver a safer aquatic environment.

Closing

SLSNSW sees the key factors to ensuring the public's safety when swimming at beaches is education and information, the provision of warnings and supervision. SLSNSW would like to thank the Committee for considering the management of sharks and the impact on communities in NSW and is looking forward to seeing how we can continue to work with the NSW Government to protect and educate beach goers.

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Department of
Primary Industries

north coast SHARKSMART

Know the risks and reduce your chances of a close encounter with a shark on the NSW North Coast.

Sharks are a natural part of a healthy ocean environment. When people enter open water, they are entering the shark's domain.

Shark attacks are rare events. Millions of us swim in waterways every year, with only a small number of attacks.

Better awareness and understanding of sharks and their behaviour can help everyone safely enjoy the water – so be SharkSmart and keep surfing, swimming, snorkelling and spearfishing.



SURF LIFE SAVING
NEW SOUTH WALES

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/sharksmart

REDUCE YOUR RISK



Swim in groups



Swim between the flags
at a patrolled beach



Tell a lifesaver or lifeguard
if you see a shark



Avoid swimming and
surfing at dawn or dusk



Leave the water if
you hear a shark alarm



Watch for diving seabirds
and feeding dolphins

north coast
SHARKSMART

Have handy SharkSmart
information and the latest
on patrolled beaches
with you all the time.

Download SharkSmart (IOS) and
Beachsafe (IOS and Android).



Download on the
App Store



ANDROID APP ON

Google play



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