

**Submission
No 65**

MANAGEMENT OF SHARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES WATERS

Name: Mr Simon Blears

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Dear Committee,

Whilst I live in Perth, Western Australia, I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to your inquiry into the Management of Sharks in New South Wales Waters.

As you will be aware, the issue of shark management or 'Shark Mitigation', as it was initially called here, is painfully new to us Western Australians. I didn't know very much about sharks before January 2014 and now know more than I actually thought I ever would. I used to eat shark, not as flake, but knowingly as Bronze Whaler and thought that they were, indeed, scary monsters of the deep (more on that later).

Since I became involved in the campaign over here to get rid of the drumlines and to stop the 'shark cull' (for that's what it was, despite what Premier Barnett would have you believe) I have become very passionate about the oceans and the animals that live in them. If only Colin knew that I (and many other West Australians and overseas submission writers, this I know for a fact) would now be writing to a NSW Government Inquiry on this matter when he and Troy Buswell concocted this plan... He successfully turned us into activists (well, me anyway)!

However, I digress. Before I get into the reasons that I oppose the existing plan and comment on the alternatives, please let me share my opinion regarding the current situation in NSW as far as the call for action or, more commonly, a cull.

The biggest problem over there appears (and I respectfully acknowledge that I am not there, so I don't know this for a fact) to be the media. I thought that 'The West Australian' was a biased rag (many shark supporters stopped buying it forever over its coverage of the cull), but the 'Daily Telegraph' (or the 'Daily Terrorgraph' as I hear it referred to quite accurately, in my opinion) takes the absolute cake. It's painfully obvious to many that they are loving this, that 'shark attacks' supposedly sells newspapers, that 'terror in the seas' supposedly sells newspapers and that they will do all that they can to whip up a frenzy over this matter. The only thing that gets bigger headlines and more coverage is an aircraft crash (or someone spilling their drink due to turbulence) or a Royal Wedding/Birth/Death. I'm not sure how, if indeed it can be, this can be managed, but education is key. Community announcements, signs on the beaches, advertisements in newspapers (I'm sure they'll take your money still) are needed to remind people that the risk of being 'attacked' by a shark is minimal compared to many other daily activities and that this minimal risk can be reduced even more and I cover that specifically later on in this submission.

Finally, I would like to commend the NSW Government. Not for the many decades of indiscriminate killing, not for the lies that it is 'protecting swimmers', not for the perpetuation of the placebo that you're safe swimming at a netted beach, but for their apparent willingness to consult the community, to listen and to undertake to use alternative methods of shark management. I only wish that Premier Barnett had done that here too before he started on his slippery slope to undoubted electoral defeat. Please continue listening, please listen to the scientists, the experts, the ones who can prove that their aren't rogue sharks, that there aren't swarms of man eating killer sharks out there just waiting to attack Mrs Smith and her 3 toddlers in the breakers at Bondi.

When we enter the ocean, we enter another domain. One where we are not Queen or King, where we are not the apex predator and where we are surely simply not entitled to kill anything that threatens us (either in reality or in perception). People need to face that fact. A lot do, but more need to be informed.

One of the key things that was constantly reiterated during the 12 months of 2014 was the number of surveys and polls, by Government, by the media or by other parties that almost without exception resulted in 70%-80% of those surveyed disagreeing with a cull. This is overwhelmingly the case and it is still happening now, with polls or surveys regarding the NSW shark 'issue'. Don't piss off 70%-80% of your potential constituency, for you will find that payback's a bitch (as Colin will) come state election time ☺.

The remainder of this submission is a guide that I wrote, using material that was generated either during the WA campaign or that has been generated specifically for the NSW/QLD/South African campaigns and that was shared on several forums to assist people who wanted to make a submission but needed help in putting their thoughts on paper. It has been modified a little from the previously published version.

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the existing Shark Management Program that is implemented in NSW waters and also wish to comment on future plans. I am totally against the current netting program for the following reasons:

- The nets are NOT a barricade, and don't prevent sharks from getting near the beach. They are designed as a culling mechanism simply in place to entangle and kill animals that are passing by. In NSW, nets are 150m long, 6m tall and usually set in 12m water – allowing sharks to swim over and around them. They are also only in the water for 8 months of the year, and only for 17 days in each month – so a lot of the time they're not even in place.
- There is no science showing that the nets make our oceans any safer for beach-goers. In fact, a 2009 government report stated that 'the annual rate of attack was the same both before and after the meshing commenced'. While the number of shark fatalities has decreased since the nets were put in the water, this is most likely due to improved medical assistance since the 1930's and not due to the nets themselves.
- Over 17,000 animals have been caught in these nets in NSW alone. Australia-wide, about 100 species such as endangered turtles, dolphins, dugongs, ray, seabirds, harmless sharks and whales have died in the nets. They have even killed orcas, little penguins and people. That's right, shark nets have killed 2 people – one in NSW and one in QLD.
- In 2013 a baby humpback drowned in the nets in Mona Vale, while its mother helplessly watched on. Each year many whales become entangled in the shark nets during their annual migration and often it is the babies that are the victims. Just to clarify, these deaths are not a trade-off for the protection of people, but are unnecessary deaths in an out-dated system that does not protect anyone.

Shark nets and drum lines are lethal culling programs that impact sharks and other marine creatures that are increasingly threatened with extinction. Sharks are apex predators and keep the ocean in balance. Without sharks, it is predicted that the entire marine ecosystem is predicted to collapse. Over

90% of the sharks in the ocean have been killed. Right now we need to do everything possible to protect them.

I firmly believe that non-lethal alternatives are available - recent technological improvements that are based on our increasing understanding of how sharks work have provided us with a range of superior alternatives. Some of these are:

- **CSIRO program** – SMS messages sent as a result of a detection of a tagged shark via Surf Life Saving. People can be asked / ordered to be removed from the water when a shark swims past an acoustic receiver on popular beaches. This technology is currently being used in WA and Northern NSW.
- **Brazilian Program** – capture and tagging sharks, then towing them out to sea. This program boasts a 97% reduction in shark bites and sharks are monitored to collect scientific data on their movements and none have returned to the beach where they were caught.
- **Eco Shark Barrier** – A 3 year trial at Coogee beach in WA began in 2014. This method forms a complete barrier between swimmers and shark with no way of entangling marine animals.
- **Clever Buoy** – Currently being developed in WA. A sonar device much like a fish finder that can recognise the swimming pattern of sharks in the area and send an instant message to lifeguards to get people out of the water.
- **Shark Safe Barrier** – Currently being trialled in South Africa, it's a visual and magnetic barrier resembling a kelp forest which deters sharks by using magnets in the structure which sharks will not cross, even to get bait.
- **Shark Spotters Program** – Used in South Africa, where volunteers use a series of flags to signal to beachgoers the presence of sharks as well as the general visibility conditions such as if the water is clear enough to see them – so people can make informed decisions when and where to swim.
- **Aerial patrols and observation towers** – Currently being used in NSW. The use of rotary wing helicopters is terribly expensive and inefficient, scientific studies have determined.
- **Fish Hoek, South Africa exclusion net** – A net off the beach that is constantly monitored for animal entrapment and is deployed each morning and removed in the evening. It provides a complete barrier between swimmers and sharks.
- **Shark Shield style devices** – Used by the Australian Navy and many divers and surfers which have proven effective.
- **Shark Attack Mitigation Suits** – SAMS in conjunction with the University of Western Australia, have created two wetsuits to reduce the chance of shark incident – one for surfers and one for divers.
- **Repellents** – Audio, chemical and bubble repellents are being developed by researchers at the University of Western Australia.
- **Beach Mufflers** – Used to disguise the sound of swimmers at the beach. This technology is being developed by Curtin University researchers.

The following text is taken from Australian National Geographic

(<http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/wildlife/2014/09/australias-keystone-endangered-species>):

Carcharodon carcharias

Found swimming in our ocean's depths, the great white shark is yet another top-order predator under threat of extinction. Like other marine predators, great whites consume a wide array of species but due to the difference in size from the juveniles to adults, this characteristic is particularly prevalent among white pointers. From 1.5m to 3m in length these sharks are highly agile and can therefore hunt fast moving fish. The largest specimens, females have been known to reach up to 6m long, usually hunt seals and sea lions and congregate near colonies of these animals.

Their need for large food surpluses help control the populations of marine species. Population estimates are extremely hard to estimate due to the lack of understanding shark migration habits. Data has found, however, that their numbers were around 10,000 in the 1950s, and the average number of sharks caught in beach protection nets has decreased by 70 per cent since that time. While sharks are currently protected under state legislation, sharks are frequently caught in commercial fishing nets and on fishing lines. This is currently the greatest threat to their survival.

One of the key messages that I'd like to pass on to you is that education is key. Public education is by far the most effective way to make people safer.

The Australian Shark Attack File states 'sharks have killed 52 people in the past 50 years (1.04 per year) in Australian waters', so rather than an over-emotional response it provides the following advice:

Swim at beaches that are patrolled by surf lifesavers.

Do not swim, dive or surf where dangerous sharks are known to congregate.

Always swim, dive or surf with other people.

Don't swim in dirty or turbid water.

Avoid swimming well offshore, near deep channels, at river mouths or along drop offs to deeper water.

If schooling fish start to behave erratically or congregate in large numbers, leave the water.

Do not swim with pets and domestic animals.

Look carefully before jumping into the water from a boat or wharf.

Do not swim at dusk or at night.

Do not swim near people fishing or spear fishing.

If a shark is sighted in the area leave the water as quickly and calmly as possible.

Finally, to close my submission, the chances of being attacked by a shark are statistically incredibly unlikely – less likely than being killed by a vending machine, or by lightning, or by a coconut falling from a tree. However we all take a calculated risk whenever we enter the ocean, something could go wrong as it could anywhere in life. You have a 1 in 11.5 million chance of being bitten by a shark and 1 in 264 million chance of being killed by a shark.

We should just accept that the ocean is where sharks live, and we're entering their territory when we're in the water – and the territory of all the other ocean creatures. After all, that's one of the things that makes the ocean so great!

Please do not make the same mistake that the Government of Western Australia did and cull sharks (with the extremely high probability of killing other marine life, some of which is either endangered or critically endangered). Set an example to the rest of Australia, to Queensland specifically (and we all know how much the New South Wales population loves Queensland) and the world. Ultimately, it will be worth it, I assure you.

Yours sincerely and respectfully,



Signed

Simon Blears
23rd October, 2015

