

**Submission  
No 57**

# **MANAGEMENT OF SHARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES WATERS**

**Organisation:** Ballina Shire Council  
**Name:** Mr John Truman  
**Position:** Group Manager, Civil Services Group  
**Date Received:** 23/10/2015

enquiries refer  
**John Truman**  
in reply please quote  
**15/74093**



23 October 2015

Dear Parliamentary Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to your Inquiry. Reducing the risks associated with the interaction of sharks and humans is an important issue within our local community following the occurrence of a number of severe incidents during 2015. We therefore welcome the initiative of the Parliament in establishing the Inquiry.

In response to the invitation to make a submission, we would firstly like to congratulate the NSW Government for the actions undertaken recently in relation to this issue. In particular we recognise the establishment of the North Coast Shark Tagging Program, the NSW Shark Summit, the Community Forum held in Lennox Head on 16 October 2015 and the aerial patrols conducted during the recent school holidays. From our perspective all of these activities have been excellent initiatives, however we consider the actions to be only the first stage of developing a future long term policy and strategic response to our concerns. In this regard we make the following comments and suggestions for your consideration.

#### Shark Mitigation Strategies

The NSW Shark Summit process was able to conduct a review of bather and surfer protection strategies. It is evident from this work that a multi-tiered approach is required and different conditions along the coast mean a range preferred solutions will be required.

It is also clear that there is some uncertainty in regards to the likely feasibility and performance of the emerging technologies when used in NSW conditions. We therefore recommend a range of trials be conducted, including further research and development where required, for the shark deterrent technologies assessed to be of interest by the Summit.

At this point in time Council has not formed a view in regards to preferred technologies for our location, however we do emphasise in addition to effective shark deterrence, the applied technologies must have an acceptable level of environmental impact which involves the protection of shark and other marine species consistent with existing legislation.

It is our position however that an aerial patrol program is required to be implemented immediately. It is our experience that aerial patrols have been essential for the protection of surfers and bathers in recent months and aerial patrols represent the most effective mitigation strategy until emerging technologies are fully trialled and implemented. Aerial patrols can also assist with scientific research and observation as well as performing other functions including search and rescue. To manage costs, consideration can be given to establishing a volunteer organisation, with government support, to operate the patrol. This model could be similar to the arrangements used for the State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service which operate with a mix of volunteer and professional human resources.

### Emergency Management

In response to the incidents in our Shire, Council, NSW Police and NSW Surf Rescue have collaborated to establish a Shark Incident Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).

This procedure enables persons to call 000 in response to shark sighting. An initial risk assessment is conducted in response to the call and where appropriate Police will activate deployment to the site with Council and Surf Rescue and a further assessment of the emergency is undertaken in accordance with surf rescue guidelines. Where the risks of human and shark interaction are assessed as potentially hazardous an evacuation and beach closure is implemented.

Since July, the procedure has been activated more than 35 times. The officer in charge of the Ballina Police Station reports there is no doubt this program has saved lives.

There are however a number of issues with the procedure. The success of the procedure has been reliant on the cooperation of a local helicopter service that has included shark observations in support to the SOP within their other commercial activities. We are very grateful for the significant community contribution provided by this operator, however the availability of this resource under these arrangements is not as operationally consistent as we would prefer. Furthermore, it is difficult for NSW Surf, Police and Council to respond on the basis that the SOP is an additional activity implemented without consideration of the availability of resources. Finally, as Ballina Shire is the only Police area with the SOP, we have experienced some communication issues with VKG understanding the required actions in response to a 000 call.

We have initiated this SOP as a trial and as temporary measure in response to the current conditions. We do however see merit in a more permanent arrangement, applied on a consistent basis for the whole of the coast. We therefore recommend the State Emergency Management Committee initiates a review of the options with the view of establishing a response procedure.

We emphasise that the emergency response after our shark attack incidents have all been highly regarded. The key point in this procedure is that is a proactive preventive strategy rather than a reactive emergency response post an event.

The use of this SOP has also identified it is very difficult to quickly clear swimming and surfing areas when a beach closure is activated. We have therefore sourced a proposal to install shark alarms at six sites in Ballina Shire. These solar powered facilities enable beach users to call a monitoring service which can be authorised by NSW Police, Council or NSW Surf to activate an alarm. This activation can be managed remotely or from the site. The system can also support other surf lifesaving activities. The capital cost for the six sites is estimated to be \$110,000. We suggest this infrastructure is an essential element of an integrated approach comprising aerial patrol, emergency response, alarm system, and shark deterrent technology.

We would therefore appreciate the Government providing funds to enable us to install this system.

### Economic Impacts

This issue has created significant national and international media interest which to a large extent has been focussed on Ballina Shire. There are concerns that this has resulted in negative economic impacts for our tourism and surf related businesses.

It is fair to say we are not certain as to the extent of this problem. We have received a number of reports of businesses significantly affected including the local surf shops and surf board manufacturers. However the Ballina Chamber of Commerce conducted an email survey of their members and have not reported a major concern. We have encouraged the Chamber to provide further details to you in a submission.

However it is interesting to note the data from one of our own facilities. Council operates a camping ground, the Flat Rock Tent Park. The comparative bookings for the last weekend in August, which is typically a very busy weekend for the park, expressed as an occupancy rate, were as follows.

2011 – 56%  
2012 – 62%  
2013 – 82%  
2014 – 65%  
2015 – 33%

Furthermore, the park operators report a cancellation by a long term customer, being a board riding group, who cancelled due to concerns regarding the sharks and for the last four years two Queensland State Schools who run surfing camps from this Tent Park did not book this year.

We therefore recommend the Division of Industry, Innovation and Investment undertake a study to assess the economic impacts associated with the concerns of shark attack on the North Coast. Research resources within Southern Cross University may be available and suitable for this task.

### Social Impacts

We continue to receive feedback that the nature of the surfing culture means this issue has resulted in significant impacts. We are mindful of raising this issue against the context of other areas who have suffered from natural disasters or prolonged drought, however we are concerned that for many who are currently forced out of the water there is the possibility that this is resulting in social and psychological impacts, and potentially lost economic production and increased costs to the local health services. We are certainly aware of many involved or connected to the severe incidents continue to express trauma issues related to these experiences.

We therefore recommend NSW Health investigates whether or not a government response is required in relation to the potential risks of social impacts within the community associated with the recent shark related incidents.

### Financial Assistance Grant

The Council and the local Jet Boat Rescue Service have encountered substantial additional costs this year in response to these incidents.

For Council, expenditure in excess of \$30,000 has been required to support aerial surveillance for a major surfing festival and general weekends. We note that the marine environment is not our jurisdiction, however this surveillance has been required to support our community in response to this issue. Further to this, significant Council resources have been required to support the response to close beaches following a shark sighting or incident.

The Council has also spent in excess of \$5,000 to implement a mobile application to inform surfers and bathers in real time of shark related beach closures and other information.

The Jet Boat Rescue Service is a community volunteer association. As noted above, the service has responded to more than 35 call outs under the SOP. We estimate this call out rate is more than five times their usual demand meaning they have incurred additional costs, especially in regards to fuel and boat maintenance costs. We suggest a financial grant of \$5,000 would assist the service to meet these costs.

We have therefore recommended the Government assist Council and the Jet Boat Rescue Service by providing funds to support our response to this issue.

### Recommendations

The following is a summary list of our recommendations.

#### Recommendation One

A range of trials be conducted, including further research and development where required, for the shark deterrent technologies assessed to meet the criteria of further interest by the NSW shark summit.

#### Recommendation Two

The North Coast Shark Tagging Program is continued.

#### Recommendation Three

An aerial patrol is established, preferably under a model of a voluntary emergency service agency.

#### Recommendation Four

The Government provide funding to install a shark alarm system at beaches in Ballina Shire as per the proposal in the above submission.

#### Recommendation Five

The State Emergency Management Committee initiates a review of the options for a preventative response procedure for the NSW Coast to be activated in response to reported shark sightings that are a risk to humans.

#### Recommendation Six

The Division of Industry, Innovation and Investment undertake a study to assess the economic impacts associated with the concerns of shark attack on the North Coast.

#### Recommendation Seven

NSW Health investigates and reports on whether or not a Government response is required in relation to the potential risks of social impacts within the community associated with the recent shark related incidents.

#### Recommendation Eight

The Government award a financial assistance grant to Council and the NSW Jet Boat Rescue Service to reimburse the additional expenses incurred in response to the management of this issue in 2015. The costs to Council are beyond its jurisdiction and the Jet Boat Rescue Service is a community volunteer organisation whose resources have been impacted by this issue having regard to the unusual extent of circumstances this year.

#### Conclusion

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. As noted above, this issue is very important to our community and we appreciate the Government's efforts to respond to community concerns. It is the case however that substantial new initiatives are required and we are looking forward to further Government commitments which will establish long term effective mitigation measures that improve the safety of surfers and swimmers while also maintaining protection of the environment.

If we can assist the Inquiry by providing further information, please contact our Group Manager Civil Services, John Truman on telephone 66 861 256.

Yours faithfully

John Truman



**Group Manager  
Civil Services Group**