

WA Premier, Colin Barnett
WA Opposition Leader, Mark McGowan
WA Minister for Fisheries, Ken Baston
WA Minister for Environment, Albert Jacob

Dear Premier Barnett, Mr. McGowan, Minister Baston and Minister Jacob,

Re: Proposal to use drum lines for shark population control and targeting of sharks entering protected beach zones

The scientific community acknowledges that the Western Australian (WA) shark situation is a highly emotive issue, in which there has been a great deal of personal suffering. We also recognise that the effects of shark bite fatalities extend beyond the individuals and their families, and impact on the wider community.

However, as scientists and professionals who work with sharks on a regular basis, we are sending this letter because we are deeply opposed to elements of the new shark mitigation policy announced by the WA State Government. While we acknowledge the need to restore public confidence and provide safe swimming areas for the community, we do not support the proposed use of lethal shark population control measures such as drum lines or targeted fishing of sharks.

As a preventative measure, the proposed solutions go significantly beyond that employed in other areas of the world. For example, whilst drum lines and gill nets are used on the east coast of Australia, there is no additional targeted fishing of large sharks in these areas. In addition, a WA Government funded report into shark control measures found that “due to the environmental impacts of shark control activities, it is not recommended that either shark nets or drum-lines be introduced into Western Australia”¹

Moreover, in response to a fatal shark bite, the identification of even the species of shark responsible is notoriously difficult and it is unlikely that a targeted fishing effort following the event will catch the individual shark responsible.

Shark control programs do not have to be lethal to be effective. For example, a new approach to shark control recently trialled in Recife, Brazil, involves capturing, transporting and releasing large sharks offshore², whilst providing an opportunity to tag and monitor the individuals caught. This approach has been extremely effective in reducing the incidence of shark bites in protected areas but without the indiscriminate killing of sharks and other marine life. Importantly, such programs should be coordinated by Government fisheries departments rather than contractors, ensuring a higher level of transparency and accountability as well as a greater opportunity for gathering scientific data on shark abundance and species composition.

We encourage you to adopt fisheries-managed, non-lethal shark control measures (personal and area-based), that will not only reduce the risk of a negative shark encounter, but will also bolster research opportunities for the tagging and monitoring of sharks in WA. Equally as important, we encourage you to further improve education and communication of knowledge (existing and that obtained through further essential research) to the community about ways to avoid negative encounters with sharks³. In this regard, we applaud the Government on the elements of the policy that seek to enhance public education and awareness of sharks and the small risk they pose to human safety.

We take a calculated risk whenever we enter the ocean, but the risk is quite small when compared to other daily activities. Rip currents, for example, are the cause of an average of 21 confirmed human fatalities per year in Australia, compared to 1 for sharks⁴. There will always be a low residual risk associated with entering the ocean; however, with better education and increased investment in monitoring and research, we can make an objective judgement as to whether or not we accept these risks.

We thank you for taking the time to consider our thoughts on this policy.

References

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[\[http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/sharks/isaf/isaf.htm\]](http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/sharks/isaf/isaf.htm)
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Yours Sincerely,

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2. Dr. Barbara Wueringer, Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, James Cook University, AU.
3. Prof. Neil Hammerschlag, Director Dunlop Marine Conservation Program, University of Miami, USA.
4. Prof. Samuel H. Gruber, Director Bimini Biological Field Station Foundation, University of Miami, USA.
5. Dr. Stephen Kajiura, Associate Professor, Florida Atlantic University, USA.
6. Dr. Henry F. Mollet, Research Associate, Moss Landing Marine Labs, CA, USA.
7. Brit Finucci, PhD Candidate, Victoria University of Wellington, NZ.
8. Florencia Cerutti, PhD Candidate, The Australian National University, AU.
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10. Lucille Chapuis, PhD Candidate, University of Western Australia, AU.
11. Austin Gallagher, PhD Candidate, University of Miami, USA.
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13. Enrico Gennari, Director of Research – Oceans Research, ZA.
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31. Ian Gordon, Shark Specialist, Off The Edge Systems, AU.
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40. Claudette Dorsey RN, Surgical Clinical Educator, Providence Little Company of Mary Med Centre, USA.
41. Prof. Christopher G. Lowe, Director of CSULB Shark Lab, California State University Long Beach, USA.
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63. Jennifer Moffatt, Director of Husbandry, The Florida Aquarium, USA.
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