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Shark patrols for coastline

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AERIAL shark patrols will operate along the South West coast from Bunbury to beaches near Margaret River on weekends and during school holidays.

Premier Colin Barnett made the announcement this week following three fatal shark attacks off Perth and the South West in the past two months.

Mr Barnett said patrols would begin as soon as a helicopter contract could be secured.

“To have had three fatal shark attacks in just the last few weeks is an unprecedented situation and it does call for urgent action,” he said.

The State Government has pledged an additional \$1 million in funding for aerial patrols of major WA beaches.

There will also be expanded life-guard services in parts of the South West, including Busselton, from

November 21, to coincide with Leavers Week.

The extra services will operate seven days a week until the end of January next year, but patrols in Bunbury will remain limited to the weekend.

Currently, City Of Bunbury Surf Life Saving Club members patrol on Saturday afternoons and all day Sunday.

The service is provided by volunteers and City of Bunbury Mayor David Smith said the council would wait to see if the Government would provide for extra patrols before considering a financial commitment.

Earlier this month, Bunbury city councillor Ross Slater called for a 1500m shark net to be built off the city's Back Beach to protect swimmers.

Dolphin Discovery Centre general

manager David Kerr described shark nets as “indiscriminate” and said marine species other than sharks would get caught in them.

“We'd certainly be concerned about the potential for them (shark nets) trapping any of our local dolphins,” he said.

Mr Kerr said staff had never seen a shark in 10 years of conducting dolphin tours.

University of Western Australia marine neuroecologist Ryan Kempster condemned the call for a shark net and threw his support behind the use of aerial patrols.

He described shark nets as “a poor use of taxpayers' money” as there was no evidence to suggest they actually reduced the risk of shark attacks on beach-goers.