



New predator enters Australian waters

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TWO years ago, recreational fisherman Steve Downs was deep-sea fishing near Rottnest Island when he caught two sharks he was unable to identify.

It turns out the species had never been seen in Australian waters before.

Mr Downs contacted the Department of Fisheries, which then brought in shark biologist Ryan Kempster, of the University of Western Australia's oceans institute, to try to determine what type of shark it was and whether or not it was a new species.

Fisheries experts in WA have previously spoken about how much there is still to be learnt about sharks, which, in addition to the recent five fatal shark attacks in the state, is why the government has put millions of dollars into shark research.

What followed was a two-year

investigation process, which included DNA sequencing.

Mr Kempster said this process proved difficult.

"DNA sequencing between closely related sharks can be tricky, as it can be so similar," he said. "When I saw them, they had characteristics of many different sharks but not all the characteristics of one species."

The mystery sharks were a male that was just under one metre long and a pregnant female about 1.2 metres long.

The sharks have now been identified as Mandarin dogfish (*Cirrhigaleus barbifer*), pictured above, a species previously found only between Indonesia and Japan, and also in New Zealand.

It is not known why the sharks were found so far from their normal habitat.

The find has scientists re-evaluating their understanding of the species.

