



# SURF LIFE SAVING AUSTRALIA POLICY STATEMENT SHARK SAFETY

POLICY  
NUMBER  
**1.10**  
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## INTRODUCTION

The probability of a shark related incident is unlikely and other forms of accidental death and injury particularly drowning are far more common for beach users. However, the risk of a shark related incident is real and this policy provides a guide for the public and the provision of lifesaving services in recognising and minimising this risk whilst sharing an environment that sharks may inhabit.

## AIM

This policy aims to:

- i. Help identify existing and potential health and safety issues.
- ii. Raise the overall awareness of hazard identification and risk reduction.
- iii. Assist in establishing risk management procedures.

## DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this document the word shark is used in the broad sense to include all sharks, although it is recognised that not all sharks are dangerous with nearly all fatal attacks in coastal waters being attributed to just three species – bull sharks, tiger sharks and white sharks (the latter also known as great white or white pointer sharks).

Shark safety or control equipment may include mesh nets or drum lines, power craft strategically placed for shark patrol and dispersing sharks from beach areas, or specially first aid provisions including specialist personnel and trauma-haemorrhage kits. Please note, mesh nets and drum lines do not exist as a barrier excluding sharks from swimmers. They are fishing devices designed to reduce the population of sharks in a shark control area.

## PERSONAL SAFETY

Some safety guidelines that may assist in reducing the risk of an incident involving sharks and humans include:

- Always swim between the red and yellow patrol flags and surf at patrolled beaches. There is an increased chance that shark safety equipment is in place and rescue services are in close proximity should an incident occur.
- Obey the lifesavers' and lifeguards' advice, and heed all flags and notice board warnings. Leave the water immediately if a shark is sighted or if advised by the lifesavers/lifeguards (siren, bell or red and white quartered flags) that a shark has been sighted.
- Avoid entering the water after dusk, at night or before dawn when some sharks are typically more active.
- Avoid swimming in or near murky or silt-laden waters.
- Avoid swimming in or near river mouths, creeks, deep channels and canals
- Avoid swimming or surfing alone.
- Avoid swimming or surfing when bleeding.
- Avoid swimming or surfing near schools of fish.
- Avoid swimming near, or interfere with, shark control equipment.

It is important to recognise that there is always some inherent risk when using an environment inhabited by sharks. The risk of a shark related incidents varies according to the time of day, time of year, the geographic location and species of shark in the area. Other forms of accidental death and injury, particularly drowning, are far more common for beach users.

## ACTIONS ON SIGHTINGS

In the event of a shark sighting the following precautions are recommended:

- i. Request all swimmers to leave the water
- ii. Close the beach to all swimming and post appropriate signage (if specific signage is not available standard "no swimming" and "danger" signs may be utilised).
- iii. Advise beach visitors to remain clear of the water.
- iv. Do not attempt to kill, capture or injure the animal.
- v. Record as much detail regarding the sighting as possible, including the size, number and behaviour of the shark(s), presence of other marine creatures (e.g. fish schools, dolphins, seals) and the response of the shark(s) to any attempt at dispersing them from the immediate vicinity.
- vi. The beach should be closed for a **minimum** of one hour from the time of the **LAST** sighting, with increased surveillance for an additional hour at the location of the sighting and surrounding areas until the potential risk is deemed to have subsided.
- vii. If absolutely necessary, engage power craft or aerial assets and attempt to disperse the shark(s) from the area by using engine noise and water surface disruption (care needs to be taken to ensure the lives of the operator and by-standers are not endangered).

**Note:** *the effectiveness and value of power craft disbursement is currently unknown and the first preference would be to close the beach and for the beach to remain closed until such time that the shark is deemed to have left the area.*

## ACTIONS IN EVENT OF SHARK ATTACK

Shark attacks can result in massive tissue damage and severe blood loss. The following general treatment applies (specific information is contained within the SLSA training manual):

- i. Bring the patient to the beach as quickly as possible.
- ii. Apply immediate first aid.
- iii. Co-ordinate hospital transport and pre-hospital emergency care.
- iv. Follow precautions outlined in 'Actions on Sightings'.
- v. Advise relevant Government Department as soon as possible and refer to any state/territory 'Shark Response Plan' where applicable (currently established in SA and WA).

## THE SHARK CONTROL PROGRAM

Refer to state/territory policy where applicable.

## FURTHER ADVICE AND INFORMATION

If you require further advice or assistance please contact Surf Life Saving Australia on (02) 9300 4000 or your state centre:

New South Wales (02) 9984 7188  
Queensland (07) 3846 8000  
Victoria (03) 9676 6900  
South Australia (08) 8354 6900  
Western Australia (08) 9243 9444  
Tasmania (03) 6223 5555  
Northern Territory (08) 8985 6588