

27 February 2017

Surf Life Saving SA (SLSSA)

Submission on the Inquiry into the efficacy and regulation of shark mitigation and deterrent measures

Submitted to:

*Christine McDonald, Secretary
Senate Environment and Communications References Committee
PO Box 6100, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600*

Background

Surf Life Saving SA (SLSSA) was formed in 1953 and operates with the mission, to save lives and build healthier and safer communities. We are committed to saving lives and are Australia's major water safety, drowning prevention and rescue authority.

SLSSA is made up of twenty one (21) Surf Life Saving Club, eleven (11) emergency operations groups and two (2) lifeguard services in South Australia. The majority of operations are in the metropolitan area with regional clubs in Whyalla, Robe and Beachport.

Last season our patrolling member's performed a total of 74,717 volunteer hours, 122 rescues, 912 first aid treatments and 16,900 preventative actions. These statistics also included 139 shark alarms, 94 searches for missing people and 57 lost children. According to Roy Morgan Research South Australia has over 9.2 million people visit our beaches each year.

Providing education and information to the general public and working with other key stakeholders

SLSSA recommends that all beachgoers visit www.beachsafe.org.au for all beach safety information. There is information available on the website in 30 languages and the website can direct swimmers to the nearest patrolled beach. Visitors to the website can view fact sheets on rips and other hazards in different languages. Visitors can also download the Beachsafe App on their smart phones.

In addition to the Beachsafe App, SLSSA will provide additional information via our social media channels and website. This information may alert beachgoers to a shark within the area.

Surf Life Saving SA works closely with the South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM), Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) and the South Australian Police (SAPOL) and provides response, support and responding in the event of a sighting or an attack in the metropolitan area and at patrolled locations.

South Australia has experienced twenty (20) fatal shark attacks in the last one hundred years. All these attacks were attributed to Great White Sharks. The last fatal attack in the metropolitan area was in 2005 and occurred five to six kilometres from shore at the Glenelg tyre reef. The last fatal attack occurred in 2014 at Goldsmith Beach on the Yorke Peninsula. Twelve (12) of these attacks were classed as unprovoked.

Shark Patrols and Sightings

SLSSA has a standard operating procedure for the sighting of sharks at patrolled beaches which include taking the initial report (position of the shark, direction of travel, action being taken, and person reporting), clearing the water and advising other agencies as required.

Surf Life Saving SA is able to make use of the Westpac Helicopter Service to monitor sharks and move them out to sea, while this is not the primary role of the service, the helicopter is able to effectively assist clubs and services at patrolled locations and provide assistance at unpatrolled beaches. The majority of sharks sighted close to beaches are bronze whalers which usually don't pose a threat to beachgoers.

The State Government through SAFECOM provides a fixed wing service that patrols from December through to April every year as a dedicated shark spotting service. Upon spotting a shark the plane sounds a siren to let people know that there is a shark in the area. The plane reports through to SAPOL who then distribute the information as per their procedure.

Shark attacks in South Australia are still a concern for SLSSA as we focus on reducing interactions between people and sharks.

South Australia has no net or drum line program. Some communities on the Yorke Peninsula have swimming enclosures adjacent their jetties due to the numbers of sharks in their local areas.

Emerging Issues

In South Australia we have seen the emergence of shark reporting via a social media site which at times is inaccurate and the reports are often not verified. This has caused the community to become concerned and sometimes overestimate the danger posed by sharks. The example of this is sharks reported a significant distance from shore with community members then declining going to the beach even though there is no threat at that location. Many of these posts are shared overseas and interstate. We believe that this can cause a decline in beach visitation and have a knock on effect to tourism and local businesses.

Recommendations

SLSSA recommends more research into shark behaviour and focus on tagging of sharks so we can understand their movements.



If we were able to advise the community of locations of sharks, we can reduce the possibility of interaction. This can have a proactive approach if there are events or activities that may be impacted as plans and actions can be taken before an event to mitigate the risk to the community.

Surf Life Saving SA is committed to working with key stakeholders within South Australia and will continue to do so as we work to build healthier and safer communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit information pertaining to this national issue.

Regards,

Clare Harris
CEO
Surf Life Saving SA