

The Honorable Mark Furner, MP
Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
1 William Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

RE: Shark Control Program

Dear Minister Furner,

Pacific Whale Foundation's (PWF) mission is to protect the ocean through science and advocacy and to inspire environmental stewardship. Over the last 40 years, we have grown in our international capacity with active research projects in Hawaii, Australia and Ecuador. Through our research program, we identify and quantify the major stressors to whales and dolphins and in conjunction with our conservation program, aim to apply this research to sustainable management of cetaceans. Our conservation work also advocates for science-based solutions to these stressors.

We are deeply concerned about the risk to wildlife posed by the Shark Control Program. According to QFish, in the last 20 years alone, there have been 356 marine mammals caught in the nets off the Queensland coast. Of these, over 77% ended in fatality. Despite the high wildlife cost, the nets do not stop sharks from entering netted beaches. In fact, 40%¹ of sharks caught in nets show the catch happened on the inside (beach facing) of the net, illustrating the animal was caught in an attempt to swim away from populated nearshore waters.

PWF would like to recommend the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries further explore alternatives to this program that are safe for beachgoers and wildlife alike. For the last 40 years, our organisation has advocated and employed science-based solutions for these very threats. We encourage your department to explore the following measures:

- Employ a scientifically sound observer program, including drone surveillance, education to beach safety professionals, and education to beach goers themselves. We are aware of the drone trial across 5 beaches in southern QLD, and we support and encourage further trials.
- Remove nets **at the very least** during whale migration. Every year from the months of May through October, tens of thousands humpback whales travel along the east coast of Australia using the East Australian Current as a navigation aid². This compresses the migratory range into nearshore waters, increasing the risk of entanglement².
- Implement the proven successful and nonlethal SMART drumline, which has seen success in catching target sharks, while alerting managers to the catch so they can

tag, release, and relocate further offshore. We are aware a 2019 Administrative Appeals Decision mandated the implementation of a SMART drumline trial and would like to request information on the timing and scope of that trial. Consider pilot programs in areas with heavily populated beaches (e.g. Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast).

- Implement a monitoring component to the Shark Control Program to allow managers and researchers to track the impact to the health of released/freed animals. This will add data to the efficacy of the program as a whole and allow for science-based re-evaluation over time.

Modernizing this 60-year-old program with new, effective, non-lethal technologies could set Queensland up to be a world leader in modern shark bite risk management, building confidence in the tourism sector, at a time when it is desperately needed following the global pandemic. We believe that the implementation of the above will position Queensland as a leader in monitoring and maintaining the health of the ocean and therefore the health of its residents and visitors. We urge the Queensland government to consider the implementation of the above listed measures that have been taken in other areas of Australia.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

1. McPhee, D. 2012. Likely effectiveness of netting or other capture programs as a shark hazard mitigation strategy in Western Australia. *Department of Fisheries, Western Australia*
2. Bolin, J., et. al. 2019. A current affair: entanglement of humpback whales in coastal shark-control nets. *Remote Sensing in Ecology and Conservation*