

# Shark Response Policy



September 2015

*This policy was adopted by Council to set governing principles in place that align the strategic direction of the organisation with community values and aspirations.*

## Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to provide direction on Shark Response protocols within the Shire of Augusta Margaret River. Implementation of this policy will assist with provision of a safer environment for the enjoyment of residents and visitors by clarifying the following:

- Criteria to assist Shire directed response to shark sightings and attacks;
- Shire response activities and communications to the public related to shark threats;
- Jurisdictions and role clarification of agencies related to response protocols;
- Prioritisation of response activities;
- Record Management;
- Financial Support.

## General Considerations

- Warning the public and closing beaches is a strategy to reduce the likelihood of shark human encounters however complete protection from sharks can never be guaranteed.
- Sharks are very mobile and are capable of travelling large distances in a short period of time.
- Authorised Persons should access credible information to inform response strategies – primarily from Water Police (9442 8600).
- The contents of this Policy are deemed manageable from a practicable and resource capacity perspective, while also giving the public the option of making an informed decision about personal safety with regards to entering the water after a confirmed shark sighting / attack.

SHARK RESPONSE PROCEDURE

## Strategy

### Responding to Shark Attacks and Sightings:

While there is no definitive South West local government approach / protocols currently being used for shark response, it was agreed by a collaborative state, local and industry Think Tank held in August 2014, that the Surf Life Saving WA assessment criteria was deemed to be best practice at this current time.

In light of this industry feedback and subsequent consultation with Think Tank partners, the following criterion is presented as the policy guideline for the Shire of Augusta Margaret River to administer regarding shark response. While not failsafe in its surety of harm reduction to the public, by adopting this approach it is deemed that the Shire is doing what is reasonable from a jurisdiction, resource capacity and practicability perspective in regards to its shark response protocols.

### Criteria of Evaluation

***All shark sightings are to be reported to Water Police on 9442 8600.***

The Shire will mobilise Authorised Persons to respond to a confirmed shark sighting reported by Water Police where it meets **ALL** of the following criteria:

**Type:** White, Whaler, Tiger or Bull Shark

**Size:** 2-3 metres in size or schooling sharks

**Location:** Sighted within 500m of shore, and within Shire managed coastline

Or

**Size:** Greater than 3 metres in size

**Location:** Sighted within 1 km of shore, and within Shire managed coastline

Where the shark species is unconfirmed but meets the remaining criteria, the Shire will also mobilise as outlined below.

Due to the minimal risk associated, if a shark reported is less than 2m in length, the Shire will monitor but maintain normal operations.

### Overarching Beach Categories

In determining the level of shark response, the following Beach Categories and summary response protocols have been established.

**Category 1** – Patrolled by Beach Life Guards or Surf Life Saving services.

**Response:** Evacuate / close beach – re-open 1 hour post last sighting.

**Category 2** – Not patrolled, easy road access, regularly populated 30+ people, car parking and amenities provided.

**Response:** Notify beach goers as soon as practicable. Post signage indicating recent shark sighting / activity. If frequency > 4 times/annum, consider permanently beach signage. Remove signage 2 hours post last sighting.

**Category 3** – Not patrolled. Access available but not regularly occupied by crowds, no amenities.

**Response:** As soon as practicable, post signage indicating recent shark sighting/activity. If frequency > 4 times/annum, consider permanently sign beach.

**Category 4** – Not patrolled. Remote, limited access, no amenities, not thought to have crowds of 10 persons or more.

**Response:** If practicable, post signage indicating recent shark sighting/activity. If frequency > 4 times/annum, consider permanently sign beach.

***The Shire operates a Beach Life Guard service at Margaret River Mouth (Category 1), while the remaining Shire beach responsibility areas relate to Category 2 and 3.***

***NB: Beach maps for Shire responsibility beaches and signage locations have been developed within Shark Response Procedure documentation.***

### **Response activities and communication to the public related to shark threat**

#### **Shark Sighting at Shire Managed Patrolled Beaches (Category 1):**

- Shire managed beaches that have Beach Life Guards patrolling (approximately December to April each year) will be closed for a shark sighting meeting the above criteria for a minimum of one hour.
- Beach closed signs will be installed by Authorised Persons at key car park and beach access points to inform the public.
- Shire employed Beach Life Guards will operationally respond to shark sightings on patrolled beaches as per current Surf Life Saving WA Shark Incident Management protocols.

#### **Shark Sighting at Shire Managed Non Patrolled Beaches (Category 2 and 3):**

- Shire controlled beaches that are NOT patrolled by Beach Life Guards will not be formally closed in the event of a shark related sighting. Instead, warning signs displaying relevant information of public interest will be erected at key car park / beach entry points as soon as practicable to notify beach goers of the potential danger.
- Where a reported shark is greater than 3 metres in size, less than 500 metres from shore and or schooling sharks, an Authorised Person will also walk the relevant beach area 1 km each side of the sighting to notify beach goers of the potential danger.
- Where it is identified that the public is in clear immediate danger from shark threat, an Authorised Person will endeavour to notify the public via the use of a dedicated speaker / siren system, where available and practical.
- Department for Fisheries scientists estimate sharks travel approximately four kilometres per hour, therefore, at non patrolled beaches, warning signs will remain in place for a minimum of two hours from the time of reported sighting, not from the time of arrival at site.
- Where the sighting occurs at dusk, or Rangers are responding to other priority matters, warning signs will stay in place for the remainder of that day, to be removed the following day.

### **Shark Attack at Shire Managed / Controlled Beaches (Category 1, 2 and 3):**

- Where a shark attack / fatality occurs at a Shire managed / controlled beach, it will be formally closed by an Authorised Person(s) for the remainder of the day of the incident.
- Upon deliberation with WA Police and Department of Fisheries, the beach may either be re-opened to the public by an Authorised Person the following morning, or remain closed for another 24 hours.
- Beach closed signs will be erected at key car park / beach entry points as soon as practicable to notify beach goers of the potential danger.
- An Authorised Person will also walk the relevant beach area one kilometre each side of the attack to notify beach goers of the potential danger.
- Where it is identified that the public is in clear immediate danger from shark threat, an Authorised Person will endeavour to notify the public via the use of a dedicated speaker / siren system, where available and practical.

### **Promotion of relevant information sources**

- The Shire will promote to the public relevant information sources to assist education, awareness raising and informed personal decision making.
  - Report Shark Sightings to Water Police on 9442 8600
  - <http://twitter.com/SLSWA> - Surf Life Saving WA Twitter
  - <http://www.sharksmart.com.au> – Department of Fisheries information portal.
  - Shire of Augusta Margaret River website / media releases
- Where shark related sightings are a frequent occurrence, that is, more than four times in one given year in one location, or in area of known shark attack / fatality, the Shire may consider installing permanent static signs to notify the public of the potential risk.
- Permanent signage may contain relevant information provided by the Department of Fisheries and Surf Life Saving WA outlining safer water use practices / considerations.

### **Jurisdictions and role clarification related to response protocols**

- Shire Authorised Personnel will respond to sightings within Shire designated beaches, and at beaches patrolled by the Shire's seasonal Beach Life Guards as per the intent of this Policy.
- The Shire will support other agencies such as the Department of Fisheries, Department of Parks and Wildlife, WA Police, Surf Life Saving WA and other local government authorities to respond to shark threat within their jurisdictions where resources and capacity is available.

- WA Police are the controlling agency for shark fatality on behalf of the coroner. The Shire will assist with beach closures, media coordination, as well as community recovery initiatives where relevant.
- Department of Fisheries is responsible for any actions related to the attempted capture and or destruction of a potentially dangerous shark(s).
- The Department for Parks and Wildlife is responsible for shark response protocols associated with beaches / coastline under its jurisdiction.
- The Department for Child Protection is available to provide linkages to counselling services for impacted community members where required.
- In the event of a shark related fatality, a debrief will be organised by the Shire post event, inclusive of response and support agencies, as well as the public (where relevant), to review and refine response protocols / areas of improvement.
- Procedure documentation will guide specific response and activation protocols for Shire Authorised Persons.

### **Prioritisation of response activities**

- Shire Rangers / Authorised Persons will respond to shark sightings as a matter of priority, except where currently engaged in or mobilised to respond to the following:
  - Fire / emergency
  - Dog attack on person
  - Stock on road
- Shire Rangers / Authorised Persons will respond to shark attacks as a matter of priority, except where currently engaged in or mobilised to respond to the following:
  - Fire / emergency
- Where priority activities divert Shire resources from dealing with immediate shark matters, secondary support resources will be activated as soon as possible to assist from the following:
  - Other on-duty Shire Rangers / other Authorised Persons
  - WA Police and other Emergency Service agencies (where relevant)
  - Neighbouring Local Governments.

### **Record management**

Responding Authorised Persons are required to collate and archive records containing the following:

- Date, location, type, size and time of shark sighting / attack and summary of activities undertaken in each instance;

The Rangers and Beach Life Guards teams will also collate and maintain a record of:

- Number of shark related activations within each financial year;
- Number of shark related closures within each financial year;
- Number of shark attacks in each financial year.

**Financials:**

- A budget allocation will be provided annually for the cost of sign replacement and upkeep and to support activities associated with implementation of this Policy.

**Application**

Responsibility for the implementation of this policy rests with the Chief Executive Officer and Directors and is to inform all strategies and plans of the Shire. The Policy is to be reviewed every three years.

DEFINITIONS	
Community	A specific geographical area, professional associations, a group with common interest, or even individuals who provide services to a specific location (Australian Safe Communities Foundation 2012).
Authorised Person	“authorised person” means a person authorised by the local government under section 9.10 of the Local Government Act;
District	“district” means the district of the local government;

<b>Adopted by Council</b>	
Last reviewed	September 2015
Related Policies	Safer Communities Policy
Related Procedures	<p>Shark Response Flow Chart</p> <p>Shark Risk Management – Responsibility matrix</p> <p>Shark Response Checklist</p> <p>Surf Life Saving WA Shark Incident Management Protocol</p>
Related Documents	<p>Shark Warning Signage</p> <p>Beach Closed Signage</p> <p>Shark Reporting Sheet</p>
Legislation	State Records Act 2000