

Queensland Shark Control Program Annual Assessment Report for 2008

This report assesses the catches of sharks and by-catch species at the 10 main shark control areas during 2008 against limit reference points determined for each species (group). Where catches are outside reference levels possible explanations and further actions are described. Readers are referred to the document entitled "A Performance Management System for the Management of Sharks and By-catch Caught in the Queensland Shark Control Program" for an explanation of the reference points. In the following assessment "catch" refers to those animals that are caught by QSCP gear regardless of whether they were subsequently released alive.

Sharks

In 2008, bull whaler catch was well above reference levels at the Sunshine Coast and Rainbow Beach. The previous years report highlighted a number of areas where the catch of bull whalers was lower than reference levels, citing lower than average rainfall conditions as the reason for the lower catches of this species. This year has seen the declining bull shark catches reversed in most areas as rainfall patterns have approached more average conditions during the spring and summer. Great hammerhead sharks were also well above reference levels on the Sunshine Coast and Rainbow Beach. A review of historical data however has highlighted a great deal of annual variability in the catch of this species.

Tiger shark catches that have previously shown declining trends in many southern locations were all within reference levels in 2008 although on the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast in particular they are still considerably less than they were a decade ago.

Bycatch

Dolphins bycatch continues to be an issue at the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast respectively, exceeding the reference level of 3. This large catch of dolphins was again largely attributed to the migration of offshore dolphins that had probably not previously been exposed to shark nets and pingers. Contractors have observed that "non local" dolphins are more likely to become entangled in nets. There have been changes to the types of dolphin pingers used in some of the QSCP areas with Savewave™ multi-frequency pingers used on some nets at Mackay, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast and Rainbow Beach. There has been no significantly increased catches on nets fitted with these pingers and catches have been distributed across all nets, and do not appear to be related to pinger type, although numbers caught are too low to determine statistical significance.

Catches of humpback whales, dugong, and Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins did not exceed reference levels in any areas in 2008. Three loggerhead turtles were also caught at Cairns although one of these was released alive.

Table 1 Catch of target and by-catch species that were outside limit reference levels in 2008. Upper and lower limit reference points for relevant species are also shown.

Area	Species	2008 Catch	Reference points
Gold Coast	Bottlenose Dolphin	3	3
	Common Dolphin	9	3
Point Lookout	No catch outside reference levels		
Sunshine Coast	Common dolphin	5	3
	Irrawaddy dolphin	3	3
	Bull whaler shark	11	2.6 - 7.8
	Great hammerhead	6	0.75 - 2.25
Rainbow Beach	Great hammerhead	6	1 - 3
	Bull whaler shark	7	1.05 - 3.15
Bundaberg	No catch outside reference levels		
Tannum Sands	No catch outside reference levels		
Capricorn Coast	No catch outside reference levels		
Mackay	No catch outside reference levels		
Townsville	No catch outside reference levels		
Cairns	Loggerhead turtle	3	3

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28/07/2008

To whom it may concern,

I write to offer the support of the Queensland Shark Control Program (QSCP) of the QLD Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (QDPI) for the Griffith Universities project "Preserving Biodiversity: Bull shark satellite tagging and community awareness program". The QSCP has supported the Universities bull shark research into the value of urban habitat to the lifecycle of bullsharks in the Gold Coast region since 2006. We offer strong support for the continuation of this work to look at movements of large bull sharks in the urban and critical coastal environments, such as southern Moreton Bay. We also see immense value in the education value of this project through the engagement and increased knowledge for community members to participate in the tracking program and opportunity to develop an awareness of the critical aquatic habitats bull sharks rely upon as sub-adults and adults. This project also has value for helping to create a sustainable future for our country by the use of workshops and to provide much needed information on the movement of these animals for the minimisation of hazardous bull shark-human interactions.

This program plays a critical role in educating the public and governments about the value of coastal habitats upon which bull sharks rely and the issue facing these apex predators and provides much needed information for the development of management models that balance the need for conservation and control of this potentially dangerous, but ecologically important species.

Yours Sincerely,

Tony Ham
Manager QSCP

Ham, Tony

From: Hargraves, Kristal
Sent: Monday, 15 September 2008 1:26 PM
To: Media Releases-Internal
Cc: Ham, Tony
Subject: MR FYI Beachgoers beware of ocean's finned occupants

To go to the GCCC and GC Bulletin this afternoon
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**Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries
Queensland Government**

Media release

15 September 2008

Beachgoers beware of ocean's finned occupants

While enjoying summer at the beach is part of our national identity, Gold Coast residents should remember that our wet playground is the year-round home to various shark species.

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) is reinforcing the message that water enthusiasts should be aware they are not alone in the 'deep blue' at any time.

DPI&F shark control program manager Tony Ham said with people flocking to the beach to take a quick dip, both swimmers and surfers needed to exercise caution.

"We encourage awareness at this time not only because there are more sharks about in the summer months but because more people venture into the water for a dip over this period," he said.

While shark nets and drumlines are in place across 85 Queensland beaches – from Point Danger to Cairns – and while surf life savers are soon to resume their positions on Gold Coast beaches, Mr Ham said these were not complete protective measures against shark attacks.

"Thinking it will never happen to you is the wrong attitude to have – shark control equipment is a risk reduction method not a guarantee that you will not encounter a shark," he said.

Mr Ham also said sharks were not exclusive to the ocean, with many inhabiting both fresh and saltwater areas on the Gold Coast.

"Heavy rain events are clearly linked to movement in bull shark populations and may increase the activity of bull sharks in areas such as canals, rivers and creeks," he said.

"Bull sharks inhabit murky water so swimming near river mouths and in canals and artificial lakes increases the risk of attack.

"Spring and summer are also breeding season for the sharks, at which time they can head kilometres up river systems to rear their pups and be found frequently in backyard canals."

Mr Ham said with increased periods of shark activity in estuary and river systems, swimmers as well as small boat operators and kayakers should also be aware of the presence of sharks.

The DPI&F has compiled these tips for awareness when swimming:

1. Swim or surf only at patrolled beaches, between the flags and where shark safety equipment is in place.
2. Obey the lifesavers' and lifeguards' advice, and heed all flags and noticeboard warnings.
3. Leave the water if a shark is sighted.
4. Do not swim or surf after dusk, at night, or before dawn when sharks become more active.
5. Do not swim or surf in murky or silt-laden waters.
6. Do not swim in, or at the mouth of, rivers, artificial canals and lakes.
7. Never swim alone.
8. Never swim when bleeding.
9. Do not swim near schools of fish.
10. Do not swim near, or interfere with, shark control equipment.

For more information on swimming safely or the shark control program go to the DPI&F website at www.dpi.qld.gov.au or call the DPI&F business information centre on 13 25 23.

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