



The Hon Mark Furner MP
Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
and Minister for Rural Communities

Our ref: CTS 23157/23
Your ref: A1193570

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21 December 2023

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
ClerksOffice@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to the petition received on 28 November 2023 by the Queensland Legislative Assembly No.3965-23 regarding the Shark Control Program (SCP).

Successive governments have recognised the vital role the Queensland SCP plays in protecting human life at popular beaches, which attract tourists from all over the world. The SCP commenced in 1962 following a number of shark bites. Between 1916 and 1962 there were 36 shark bites recorded in Queensland, resulting in 19 fatalities. The success of the Program is represented by Queensland, having only two shark bite fatality on a protected beach since 1962.

The Queensland Government always puts the safety of people first and will not make changes, including the removal of shark nets, until effective alternatives are identified and proven suitable for Queensland conditions.

The *Queensland shark management plan 2021-2025* sets out how the Queensland Government will continue work to reduce the risk of shark bites through the traditional program, while researching and trialling new shark mitigation technologies and boosting community education on SharkSmart behaviours. The Plan and other related reports are available on the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries' website. An end of Plan review will commence in late 2024 and will provide advice to government on future options for the Program.

Trials are being carefully planned based on the recommendations in the report *Queensland Shark Control Program - review of alternative approaches* and advice from the Shark Control Program Scientific Working Group, which is comprised of experts in the field. The final evaluation of all trials will include an assessment of cost-effectiveness and suitability to local Queensland conditions. These trials include:

SharkSmart drone trial. The department has partnered with Surf Life Saving Queensland to deliver a trial of shark-spotting drones. The SharkSmart drone trial was launched in September 2020 and will continue until 2025. The trial now operates at 10 beaches from the Gold Coast to Townsville with drones flying every weekend and public

holiday, and every day during Queensland school holidays, subject to weather conditions. More information can be found at www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/shark-control-program/shark-control-equipment/drone-trial.

Catch alert drumline trial. The department began trialling catch alert drumlines in September 2021 and will continue trials until June 2025. The trial was initially conducted at four beaches along the Capricorn Coast. The catch alert drumline trial is delivered by the department and co-funded by the Federal Government as part of the joint commitment to trial alternatives in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. An evaluation of the first phase of the trial is now complete and planning is underway to expand the trial to Cairns and Mackay, commencing in early 2024. More information can be found at: www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/shark-control-program/shark-control-equipment/catch-alert-drumline-trial.

Personal Electronic Deterrents. The department has commissioned research to assess the efficacy of personal electronic deterrent devices on tiger sharks, a species of concern for Queensland. Personal electronic deterrent devices emit an electrical field that deters sharks. Previous testing has been limited to white and bull sharks. This research is now complete and will help inform how this technology can be used in Queensland. The results of this research can be found at <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/shark-control-program/science-and-research/shark-research>.

Shark barrier trial in North Queensland. The department, in partnership with the Federal Government conducted scoping works for a shark barrier trial in North Queensland, as part of the joint commitment to trial alternatives in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The suitability and risk assessment of deploying a shark barrier found that they are not suitable for Queensland beaches at this time due to various factors, including local beach conditions, tidal range and currents, protected marine habitats and community support for an installation. The department will continue to monitor advancements in technology regarding shark barriers, including beached based electronic barriers, for future consideration.

The Queensland Government is committed to reviewing and adapting the Program in line with emerging science, technology and community expectations. The Queensland Government will continue to do everything it can to ensure the safety of water users at beaches with Program equipment while minimising impacts on other marine life. For example, the Program implemented the latest technology in acoustic whale alarms to deter whales from approaching the Program apparatus. The aim is to reduce the risk of entanglements while continuing to ensure water users' safety is not compromised.

Up to 45 000 whales migrate along the east coast of Australia each year. The percentage of interactions is very low and releasing entangled whales continues to be a Program priority. Fully trained marine animal release teams (MART) located at Mackay, Sunshine Coast, and the Gold Coast use best-practice techniques to quickly and safely release marine animals from Program equipment. A network of volunteer observers on the Sunshine Coast and the

Gold Coast, with assistance from Surf Life Saving Queensland and Sea World, help identify and confirm whale entanglements so MART can respond and give animals the best chance of being successfully released.

If a member of the public sees an entangled whale, it is important not to approach or try and release it. Reports of whale entanglements with Program equipment can be made via the shark control program hotline on 1800 806 891. Trained and properly equipped experts will then do their job.

The Program is strongly supported by Local Governments, Surf Life Saving Queensland, local businesses, and the tourism industry. As the Program cannot entirely remove the risk of shark bite, and not all of Queensland can be protected, all water-users are called upon to do their part and be SharkSmart. The SharkSmart campaign launched in September 2020 encompasses a broader education program including partnerships with Sea World and Surf Life Saving Queensland to provide tailored SharkSmart education programs.

The campaign encourages water users to take personal responsibility by following the SharkSmart tips every time they are on or in the water:

- swim between the flags at patrolled beaches and check signage
- have a buddy and look out for each other
- avoid swimming at dawn or dusk
- reduce risk, avoid schools of bait fishing or diving birds
- keep fish waste and food scraps out of the water where people swim
- swim in clear water away from people fishing.

Further information about the Program is available online at www.fisheries.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Furner'.

MARK FURNER MP

**Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and
Minister for Rural Communities**