



2 March 2017

**Surf Life Saving NSW and Australian Lifeguard Service (ALS) NSW  
Submission on the Inquiry into the efficacy and regulation of shark mitigation and  
deterrent measures**

*Submitted to: Senate Environment and Communications References Committee  
PO Box 6100, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, 2600.*

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## **Introduction**

Surf Life Saving NSW (SLSNSW) and the Australian Lifeguard Service (ALS) NSW would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit a paper for this Inquiry.

In this submission we would like to draw the Committee's attention to the impact that shark attacks and sightings have on Surf Life Saving services by placing higher demands on our operations and resources. We would also like to highlight the range of mitigation and deterrent measures that we currently have in place and recommend further mitigation and deterrent measures for the Committee's consideration.

SLSNSW and the ALS NSW recognises that shark incidents are an ongoing concern in the community, but believe it is important to inform and not alarm people. SLSNSW and the ALS NSW would like to see greater emphasis on providing information about sharks that complements existing water safety messages and educates the community about swimming at patrolled beaches. This is the most simple and effective way to enhance the level of safety we are able to provide visitors to our beaches, as it provides supervision and surveillance.

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## **Background of Surf Life Saving NSW (SLSNSW)**

### ***Who we are***

Since 1907, Surf Life Saving has been committed to saving lives and is Australia's major water safety, drowning prevention and rescue authority. Surf Life Saving is the largest volunteer movement of its kind in Australia and it continues to grow.

SLSNSW is made up of 129 Surf Life Saving Clubs, 11 Branches and 75,000 members. Since recording began in 1949, our volunteers have performed over 355,000 rescues.

Last season our 74,686 lifesavers watched over 6.8 million people who visited NSW beaches. Our lifesavers carried out 6,672 rescues, 157,986 preventative actions and 14,708 first aid cases.



### ***Why we exist***

To save lives, create great Australians and build better communities.

### **Background of the Australian Lifeguard Service (ALS) NSW**

#### ***Who we are***

The Australian Lifeguard Service (ALS) NSW is the largest provider of professional lifeguard services in the Southern Hemisphere. With over 30 years' experience, the ALS NSW provides professional lifeguard services to local government, corporations, sporting organisations and national parks. Currently the ALS NSW provides patrol services to over 90 locations, 15 local government authorities, 2 resorts and 2 national parks.

Seasonally, the ALS NSW employs in excess of 330 lifeguards each year, making us the largest single employer of lifeguards nationally. These patrols are delivered outside of volunteer patrol times or alongside volunteer patrols throughout the lifesaving season (typically September to April).

Last season our lifeguards watched over 4.13 million people who visited NSW beaches. Our lifeguards carried out 830 rescues, more than 254,000 preventative actions and 6,460 first aid treatments.

#### ***Where do we operate***

The ALS NSW currently operates lifeguard services in the following areas: Ballina Shire, Bega Valley Shire, Bellingen Shire, Byron Shire (including the Cape Byron Trust) Clarence Valley Shire, Great Lakes, Greater Taree City, Kempsey Shire, Magenta Golf and Country Club, Munmorah State Conservation Area, Nambucca Shire, Parramatta City, Pittwater, Port Macquarie-Hastings, Port Stephens, Richmond Valley Shire, Royal National Park, Shoalhaven City and Tweed Shire.

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### **The impact of shark attacks on Surf Life Saving in NSW**

Following the shark attacks this year and increased sightings of sharks, there have been heightened demands on our lifesaving services out of patrol season. As our patrolling season didn't start until Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> September (start of the NSW School holidays) there was a considerable drain on our volunteer resources over the winter break, which is typically the quieter time of the year for our lifesavers.



Whilst surf lifesavers are always vigilant, our lifesavers have gone above and beyond their normal volunteer duties to protect beachgoers over the winter period/off-season. SLSNSW would like the Federal Government to recognise the outstanding work of our volunteer lifesavers, particularly across the North Coast and Far North Coast, who have done an incredible job, particularly over the last two years responding to shark sightings and assisting members of the general public and other emergency services where required.

With the increased number of shark sightings, it has resulted in increased callouts through our Emergency Response System. There has been an increase of 61.5% in callouts from 2014-15 to 2016-17, with a 438.4% increased spike last year from the prior year.

These callouts have a significant impact on our support services such as jet skis and offshore rescue boats, and have resulted in a number of our SLSCs and volunteers paying expenses out-of-pocket to cover fuel and operational costs with the increased requests for our services out of patrol season.

There have also been increased demands on lifesavers and other SLSNSW personnel to respond to escalating enquiries from the media; and calls from the general public. Furthermore a significant amount of time has been taken up attending meetings, community consultations and attending shark forums. The extra duties our volunteers have taken on over the last two years, particularly out of the patrol season, have resulted in a considerable drain on our personnel and resources.

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### **The range of mitigation and deterrent measures currently in place**

SLSNSW currently has the following mitigation and deterrent measures in place to prevent attacks by sharks.

#### ***Patrolling beaches ensuring supervision and surveillance***

The primary role of Surf Life Saving is to save lives at the beach. One of the most effective ways that SLSNSW protects beachgoers is to patrol beaches and SLSNSW does this across 129 volunteer based SLSCs, through our support services and our Emergency Response System. The ALS NSW provides patrol services to over 83 locations throughout NSW.

The simplest and most effective safety measure that members of the general public can follow is to only swim at patrolled beaches and swim between the red and yellow flags. This is the best place to swim because lifesavers and lifeguards are able to monitor all risks to maximise the safety of swimmers.

Last year through funding provided by the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI), SLSNSW was able to purchase additional shark alarms in priority areas and previously through the Observations Towers Funding Grant, SLSNSW distributed every SLSC in NSW with a loud hailer and water resistant binoculars. The binoculars are a vital piece of equipment for NSW



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lifesavers to effectively spot sharks, increasing the level of supervision for the beach attending public.

With the majority of NSW beach goers swimming between the flags, the benefits of early shark detection and notification is maximised. In some case where the resources are there, patrolled beaches may also sound a shark alarm which directs people to leave the water as soon as it is sounded.

#### ***Refined procedures for shark observation and incident response – State Operations Centre***

SLSNSW and the ALS NSW have been actively working with the NSW Government following the announcement of the NSW Shark Management Strategy in 2015. SLSNSW and the ALS NSW have subsequently refined procedures for shark observation and incident response. SLSNSW has Standard Operating Procedures in place, that have been approved by the DPI and our Duty Officers have been briefed on what these procedures are; and these have been subsequently amended to incorporate procedures for trials and increased surveillance by the DPI.

In July 2016, the DPI increased their aerial surveillance flights and SLSNSW has worked very closely with the DPI to refine the procedures if sharks were observed by the contracted helicopters. The DPI was given access to the SLSNSW Coastal Radio Network and protocols were established for communication between the helicopters and the SLSNSW State Operations Centre (SOC) to ensure that responses (both non urgent and urgent) were communicated effectively. The SLSNSW SOC has managed over 320 radio calls from the DPI aerial patrols (February 2017) and the SOC also supports the DPI's trial of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV's).

Surveillance flights provided by the NSW Government are in contact with our SOC which operates year-round and is able to inform local lifesaving assets of any sightings. A significant advantage of our SOC is that we are able to contact other emergency services including Water Police, lifeguards, and paramedics to assist in making appropriate decisions in real time. As an organisation we want all parties actively involved in what has become an integrated process with the development of new technology, and all emergency agencies have the same goal of keeping people safe.

#### ***Supporting the Department of Primary Industries Meshing Program, Trial and VR4G listening stations***

SLSNSW has supported the DPI with its meshing program from Illawarra to Newcastle and has also supported the DPI meshing trial in the Far North Coast area.

The DPI has installed a range of VR4G listening stations along the NSW Coast and if a tagged shark comes within 500m of a VR4G listening station then an alert comes through on the SharkSmart App and the Twitter Feed. This alert has provided an additional tool for SLSNSW and ALS NSW, as if there is enough reliable information on hand, they are able to pass on this information to the relevant authorities.



## *Providing education and information to the general public*

### Beachsafe

SLSNSW recommends that Government authorities, the media and tourism industry actively promote to visitors that they visit [www.beachsafe.org.au](http://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, bluebottles and other hazards in different languages. Visitors can also download the Beachsafe App on their smartphones, which provides access to patrol locations and hours; and real-time weather and surf conditions, anywhere along the coast. The Beachsafe App also provides a link to the Shark Smart App.

### Coastal Accommodation Network

SLSNSW and the ALS NSW would like to see Government authorities encourage accommodation providers to join the Surf Life Saving Coastal Accommodation Network so they can pass on important beach safety information to their guests to help them stay safe when swimming along our coastline. Our Coastal Accommodation Network links accommodation providers throughout the state with Surf Life Saving to achieve the following:

- To raise beach safety knowledge and awareness among visitors to coastal locations
- To reduce the incidence of rescues among visitors to coastal locations
- To reduce the incidence of drowning among visitors to coastal locations

SLSNSW has recently introduced a Coastal Accommodation Network e-newsletter. This e-newsletter is an initiative of SLSNSW to provide accommodation providers with updates that are timed to coincide with each school holiday period. This newsletter includes surf safety resources and information on safety signs so guests are 'beach ready' and know what the different warning signs mean. In addition, shark management stories have been included in the September and December 2016 editions of the Coastal Accommodation Network e-newsletter to promote awareness.

### SharkSmart Program

SLSNSW supported the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) in its launch of the 'SharkSmart' campaign in 2015, a state-wide information campaign to help the general public be aware of how they can minimize the risk of being in waters where sharks may be present. Through our partnership, we have seen information distributed to every Surf Life Saving Club (SLSC) from the Mid North Coast extending through to the Queensland border. These resources have been made available to the public as well as coastal accommodation providers. These resources contain safety tips and advice from the DPI and is intended to reassure visitors to our beaches.



SLSNSW has played a key role in providing community education through the SharkSmart program. Since October 2015, SLSNSW has distributed nearly 7,500 stickers and flyers; and 2,500 posters to all our Surf Life Saving Clubs from the Hunter through to the Far North Coast, along with accommodation providers from Sydney up towards the North Coast. In addition to the printed material, these resources are also available online for accommodation providers to download from the DPI website <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/info/sharks/tips-to-reduce-your-risk-of-shark-attack> and also available through the Surf Life Saving NSW website – [www.surflifesaving.com.au](http://www.surflifesaving.com.au).

### ***Providing information through our communication channels***

In addition to the above communication channels, SLSNSW has initiated alerts for the start of shark net trials to members and the general public to remind them not to interfere with any shark nets. SLSNSW has also distributed posters to SLSCs throughout the state, advising them of the VR4G listening station buoys being installed to track tagged sharks. Further, SLSNSW has done some work around the use of drones for shark management, and put out advice to SLSCs about the scheduled surveillance runs being conducted by drones during the school holidays.

### ***Providing First Aid treatment and CPR***

By swimming at patrolled beaches, it ensures that lifesavers and lifeguards are able to monitor and respond to risks, such as encounters with marine life such as sharks. Given the nature of injuries sustained from a shark, managing wounds and bleeding is best undertaken by someone who is trained and/or able to give assistance to the victim. All our patrolling lifesavers and lifeguards have undertaken the minimum first aid requirements to equip them in being able to respond to any incidents.

### **Providing surfers with CPR training through the Surfers Rescue 24/7 Program**

In 2012, Surf Life Saving NSW partnered with Surfing NSW to provide the CPR component of their *Surfers Rescue 24/7* program. Through the NSW Government's Water Safety Black Spot Fund, Surfing NSW obtained funding to give all surfers in NSW the opportunity to do a CPR and Board Rescue Course. To date, this program has delivered training to over 4,000 people with 362 recorded rescues.

After completion of this course, board riders will have learnt essential board rescue techniques and will have a nationally accredited CPR statement of attainment (HLTAID001 – Perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation). This will provide board riders with the skills required to rescue people in the surf, particularly when lifesavers or lifeguards are not on duty (outside of patrol hours).

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### **Working with key stakeholders**

SLSNSW and the ALS NSW have been actively involved with other stakeholders and provided input at the Shark Summit, along with the NSW Government Inquiry into Shark Management and we have also attended a number of meetings to assist in providing a multi-agency response with the NSW Government, the DPI, local councils and the CSIRO.



SLSNSW continues to liaise with the NSW DPI and through our representatives on Local and Emergency Committees to ensure we are able to undertake a long term strategic approach to mitigate shark incidents and to gather the information to deliver a safer aquatic environment.

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### **Emerging mitigation and deterrent measures**

SLSNSW supported the UAV trial across the five locations of Ballina, Lennox Head, Evans Head, Red Head and Kiama with the DPI and SLSNSW and the ALS NSW are also working with the Little Ripper Lifesaver to conduct surveillance at various locations across the state which includes monitoring shark encounters. SLSNSW's volunteers and the ALS NSW lifeguards have begun UAV Pilot Training under the Little Ripper Lifesaver group's *Unmanned Operated Certificate* to further develop SLSNSW's capacity for enhanced beach surveillance and response.

### **Alternatives to currently employed mitigation and deterrent measures, including education**

As previously mentioned, SLSNSW has undertaken a significant amount of work to educate the general public about surf safety, along with providing tips to reduce the risk of encounters with sharks through the SharkSmart Program with the NSW DPI and through our Coastal Accommodation Network and social media forums.

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### **Recommendations**

- 1) SLSNSW and the ALS NSW strongly recommend a full review of the NSW Government's Shark Incident Response Plan and that SLSNSW and ALS NSW be the key coastal agencies represented in the review.
  - 2) SLSNSW and the ALS NSW recommend clarification around the responsibilities for the closing and re-opening of beaches, and subsequent enforcement of beach closures and ensuring appropriate supervision. It is also recommended that this be clarified in proposed revisions to the NSW Government's Practice Note 15 to assist councils carry out their water safety functions and responsibilities.
  - 3) SLSNSW and the ALS NSW recommend the State Operations Centre is further established as a main communication point for the relevant agencies and government authorities that have a role in coastal safety. This will ensure a greater centralisation of processes and a rapid response to shark encounters right across New South Wales.
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### **Closing**

SLSNSW sees the key factors to ensuring the public's safety when swimming at beaches is through the provision of warnings, supervision and education; along with consistency and co-ordinated protocols for responding to shark encounters.

SLSNSW would like to thank the Committee for considering the management of sharks and the impact on communities and is looking forward to seeing how we can continue to work with all levels of Government to protect and educate beach goers.



***Authorised by:***

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