

Australian Greens' additional comments

Shark mitigation and deterrent measures: Fear and facts

1.1 The Australian Greens do not support the use of lethal shark mitigation methods, such as shark nets. This inquiry has established that shark nets currently in place in New South Wales and Queensland are significant and indiscriminate killers of protected marine life; provide no guarantees of safety to ocean users; and are an outdated, last century approach to shark mitigation.

1.2 Accordingly, many environmentalists will be disappointed that the committee's primary finding—Recommendation 1—does not call for the immediate removal of all shark nets; and instead recommends phasing these nets out over time.

1.3 In saying this, we acknowledge the political difficulty in immediately removing shark nets. Even so, we would hope to see a commitment from both federal and state governments that they are no longer necessary and should be phased-out and replaced with other measures. This will require a staged process, and federal leadership given the differences in opinion amongst the states. The establishment of both the National Shark Summit and the National Shark Working Group recommended in the committee report would be critical in achieving this.

1.4 It is unfortunate that the federal Labor Party could not even agree with this somewhat 'soft' Recommendation 1. We expected opposition from the Liberal Party to any removal of lethal mitigation measures—they seem determined to go a step further and remove the Great White Shark from EPBC listing and introduce shark culls. However, we had hoped that federal Labor might have sided with the Western Australian Labor Government's position that lethal mitigation options are not necessary, rather than Queensland Labor's position of continued use of unnecessary destructive nets and drum lines. The firm weight of evidence received through this inquiry supports this view, but it was still ignored.

1.5 The Greens have grave fears about the future survival of the Great White Shark and other shark species like the Grey Nurse Shark in Australian waters. Much depends on the interpretation of a scientific study soon to be released which estimates Great White Shark population numbers. The Greens were hopeful this study may have been released prior to this committee report and are disappointed this was not possible. Given the current acute politicisation of the risks of shark encounters and concerns over moves to delist the Great White Shark from EPBC protection, conservationists and the many users and lovers of the ocean who don't support killing sharks will need to be vigilant in the future to make sure sharks are better protected.

1.6 As acknowledged in this committee report, the subject matter at hand is very emotive, highly political, can be very divisive and media coverage is sometimes brutal and unrelenting. We acknowledge this can take its toll on those educating, advocating and working in this field.

1.7 The Greens would also like to place on record our appreciation for the work of the many scientists and community members who research sharks and their impact on healthy oceans, especially Dr Barry Bruce from CSIRO who has spent nearly 20 years building scientific capacity in our understanding of one of the world's most misunderstood creatures: the Great White Shark.

Senator Peter Whish-Wilson
Chair