

Coalition Senators' additional comments

1.1 Coalition Senators wish to make clear that public safety in the water is paramount and must be the central consideration in discussions around shark mitigation and deterrent measures. Water users, namely surfers, swimmers and divers, must be made aware of known risks relating to shark sightings or encounters and all effective shark mitigation and deterrent measures must be considered in pursuit of improving public safety.

1.2 Coalition Senators share the concerns expressed through the inquiry regarding bycatch and shark mortality from current mitigation and deterrent measures and agree that, where possible and without exposing the public to increased risk, this is to be minimised. On that basis, Coalition Senators largely support the use of non-lethal and deterrent measures where such measures are proven to be as effective as existing measures.

1.3 Throughout this inquiry, Coalition Senators having consistently observed that environmental ideology must not prevent nor detract from the preservation of human life.

1.4 Many recommendations relate to state and territory laws and Coalition Senators note that it is largely the responsibility of these governments to ensure public safety in the water and manage the risks to humans from sharks.

1.5 The Australian Government has responsibility to ensure that state and territory shark mitigation and public safety activities are consistent with national laws. It therefore follows that the Australian Government should not be involved in shark management and monitoring other than that which is required under Commonwealth legislation.

1.6 Coalition Senators note that the Australian Government is responsible for managing fishing activity in Commonwealth fisheries, which includes commercial fishing on shark certain shark species.

1.7 Target species in Commonwealth fisheries include gummy sharks and other small species. Some larger species, known to have been harmful to humans, may be taken as bycatch, but this is generally limited. There is generally an ecological divide between the sharks that are targeted for food or captured as bycatch and those that are considered dangerous to humans.

1.8 Commonwealth fisheries management does not include other anthropogenic interactions with sharks, such as clinical information around shark bite incidents or bather protections in coastal waters.

1.9 Coalition Senators note that no questions were raised during the inquiry regarding issues relevant to Commonwealth fisheries management, such as commercial fishing activities and their impact on shark populations.

1.10 Coalition Senators note that the development of grant programs requires the appropriate constitutional and legislative coverage. Consideration should also be given to the appropriate agency with portfolio responsibility for the matters covered by any proposed grant program. Any additional funding would need to be considered in the context of other budget priorities and should be outcomes focused.

1.11 With regard to exemptions granted under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), Coalition Senators are not satisfied that sufficient evidence has been presented to the inquiry to suggest that the Minister for the Environment and Energy has exercised powers inconsistent with the law or the intention of the law. On that basis, Coalition Senators do not see the basis for recommendations relating to section 158 of the EPBC Act.

The Western Australia Case

1.12 Evidence provided to the committee was largely related to the mitigation measures adopted in Queensland and New South Wales, such as shark nets and drum lines, which the Western Australian government is yet to implement, based on ideological, rather than safety grounds.

1.13 In New South Wales and Queensland, at the approximately 85 protected beaches, only one death has resulted in the last 50 years. Despite these statistics, the Australian Greens-led inquiry insisted that "nets and drum lines don't make beaches safe" which the Coalition Senators strongly reject.¹

1.14 Coalition Senators acknowledge and note that the circumstances, environment and conditions in the West are significantly different and many of the assertions gathered from this politically charged inquiry were largely based on metrics and evidence that are inappropriate to apply to all states and territories. Coalition Senators are of the view that any policy formed in relation to human safety in the water must not be outweighed by environmental ideology.

1.15 Consistent evidence from witnesses in Western Australia noted that there has been an increase in shark numbers and changes in shark behaviours. Coalition Senators note the overwhelming evidence to the effect:

Since [2007] we have observed a huge increase in the number and size of great white and bronze whaler sharks as well as a change in their behaviour...shark behaviour changes have been remarkable in the last decade.²

1 Senator Whish-Wilson, *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2017, p. 12.

2 Mr Russell Morey, *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2017, p. 50.

1.16 Coalition Senators note further evidence from Western Australian individuals who have spent their livelihoods in and around the Western Australian coastline and waters:

I'd never seen a great white in the ocean until 2010; now I see them several times a year...Adult great whites eat mammals almost exclusively, and we're mammals. Colours, stripes, helicopters, signs will have no effect on shark behaviour.³

1.17 Coalition Senators note that without further studies and research, it is difficult to definitively rule out any measures to mitigate shark attacks and reduce the risk to human life in the water, including shark population control.

1.18 Given the need to further understand the shark population, their breeding patterns and behaviours, Coalition Senators agree in principle with Mr Ranford's statement that:

As our population rapidly expands along the coastline, growing conflict between humans and sharks is inevitable. It is thus time to commit to the funding of these technologies as well as research to learn more about shark behaviours and populations.⁴

1.19 In contrast to the experiences of Queensland and New South Wales, 15 lives have been lost in Western Australia as a result of shark attacks since 2000, with many more wounded. Coalition Senators believe that the Western Australian Government should take more pro-active public safety measures to protect beachgoers at popular beaches.

1.20 Lastly, Coalition Senators acknowledge and pay their respects to the victims of shark attacks in WA and the east coast. In particular, during the conduct of this Inquiry, 17-year-old Laeticia Brouwer from Western Australia tragically lost her life due to a shark attack and others have since been attacked in the same water.

Senator Jonathon Duniam
Deputy Chair
Senator for Tasmania

Senator Linda Reynolds CSC
Senator for Western Australia

3 Mr Russell Morey, *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2017, p. 50.

4 Mr Blair Ranford, *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2017, p. 62.

