

# MODERNISING SHARK SAFETY IN NSW

## WE CAN RELY ON TODAY'S TECHNOLOGY AND RETIRE OUTDATED SHARK NETS

*Operated by the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD),* the Shark Meshing Program began culling sharks on Sydney's ocean beaches in 1937, thinking it would reduce the risk of shark bite. We now know better.

Each year the Program installs shark nets at 51 ocean beaches from Newcastle to Wollongong. The shark nets **ARE NOT** barriers separating the beach from the open ocean but are designed to indiscriminately catch and kill whatever swims into them. Thankfully modern, effective and non-lethal measures are now in place for shark safety at the beach.

Shark nets **do not reduce** the risk of shark bite

Shark nets **kill indiscriminately**

Shark nets are putting **species at risk** of extinction

Effective **non-lethal measures** are already in place

Scientists, experts and communities **support** net removal



# PROBLEM: SHARK NETS DO NOT REDUCE THE RISK OF SHARK BITE

Shark nets **are not barriers** to the open sea. They do not span the beach. They are small gill nets only 150m long and 6m tall, set in water 10m deep. There can be hundreds of metres or even kilometres of open water around them

Sharks can easily swim **over, under and around** them and get to the beach

Every beach with a shark net has alternative, **non-lethal measures already in place** that can actually reduce the risk of shark bite

40% of sharks caught in shark nets are on the **beach side** of the net, caught when they are swimming back out to sea<sup>1</sup>

Studies have shown **no difference in the risk** of a shark interaction between netted and unnetted beaches since 2000<sup>2</sup>

Animals entangled in the nets could **even attract** large sharks to shore

1 | 'Final Recommendation Current Shark Meshing Program in New South Wales Waters' NSW Fisheries Scientific Committee, 2004.

2 | 'Shifts in the incidence of shark bites and efficacy of beach-focussed mitigation in Australia', Huveneers et al, 2024

# PROBLEM: SHARK NETS KILL INDISCRIMINATELY

*Shark nets are recognised* in law as a 'key threatening process' to threatened species under the NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994 and the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. This means that the use of shark nets threatens species' survival.

Since 2000, 93% of animals caught in shark nets were **not** the targeted shark species

Shark nets caught one threatened turtle **every 7 days** on average during the 2023/24 season

## SINCE 2000 NSW SHARK NETS HAVE CAUGHT:



**97**  
DOLPHINS



**234**  
TURTLES



**2,300**  
RAYS



**188**  
CRITICALLY ENDANGERED  
GREY NURSE SHARKS



**2,679**  
NON-TARGET SHARKS

**62% OF THESE ANIMALS WERE KILLED**

Shark nets are designed to entangle and kill any animal that swims into them. This includes dolphins, turtles, rays, penguins, seals and many other species.

# SUPPORT FOR NET REPLACEMENT:

## SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT:

NSW scientific committees that review the Shark Meshing Program repeatedly express their concern over shark nets.

*“The Fisheries Scientific Committee was disappointed that a decision was made to continue with the net program for the 2023/24 season despite substantial evidence and growing support from multiple councils, NGO’s and the community for their removal and implementation of alternative methods.”* -2022-23 Annual Performance Report for the Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program

*“We are extremely concerned that the current management actions are not meeting either objectives [to reduce the risk of shark bite and minimise the harm on wildlife].”* -NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee Response to the Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program 2021/2022 Annual Performance Report

## THE ALTERNATIVES TO SHARK NETS THAT ARE ALREADY IN PLACE ALONGSIDE THE NETS INCLUDE:

- Drone Surveillance
- Public Education on Shark Smart Behaviour
- Shark Listening Stations
- SMART Drumlines
- Personal Shark Deterrents are also effective and available for individuals

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT:

Independent polling demonstrates a consistent preference for non-lethal alternatives over shark nets, such as drone surveillance, personal shark deterrents, listening stations, surf lifesaving, shark smart education and SMART drumlines.<sup>3</sup> Shark nets are not supported.

A report produced by DPIRD following its 2019 survey of coastal community and council views concluded: *“Shark nets are no longer suitable as a shark bite risk mitigation measure due to their **inability to protect ocean-users**, the impact on marine wildlife and their resultant unpopularity. Alternative measures can actually reduce the risk via detection (drone surveillance) and deterrence (personal shark deterrents, SMART drumlines, etc) without the cost to marine wildlife.”* -‘Preferred Shark Mitigation Measures of NSW Coastal Councils and their Communities’ (2019).

In 2021, the NSW Local Government Association unanimously resolved in support of a motion to **phase out shark nets altogether**.



## SHARK CHAMPIONS WITH HSI AND AMCS

This work was funded by the Shark Conservation Fund, a philanthropic collaborative pooling expertise and resources to meet the threats facing the world’s sharks and rays. The Shark Conservation Fund is a project of Rockerfeller Philanthropy Advisors.



3 | ‘Preferred Shark Mitigation Measures of NSW Coastal Councils and their Communities’ University of Wollongong, Mehmet et al, 2019.; ‘Shark Sentiment Report: Executive Summary and Recommendations’ Charles Sturt University, Simmons et al, 2017.