



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

Our ref: CTS 24303/21

7/12/2021

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Mr Neil Laurie  
Clerk of the Parliament  
Queensland Parliament  
George Street  
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Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter of 18 November 2021 regarding petition number 3599-21 received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly about the Shark Control Program (the Program).

Please note that successive governments have recognised the vital role the Program plays in protecting locals and tourists at popular Queensland beaches. The Palaszczuk Government always puts human life and human safety first and will not make changes to the Program until alternatives have been identified, trialled and proven effective in local Queensland conditions.

The Queensland Shark Management Plan 2021 - 2025 (the Plan) and other related reports are available on the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries' (DAF) website. The Plan 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.

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

**SharkSmart drone trial** - DAF has partnered with Surf Life Saving Queensland to deliver a trial of shark-spotting drones. The trial operated at seven beaches across Cairns, Magnetic Island, the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast and North Stradbroke Island. The first phase of the SharkSmart drone trial ran from September 2020 to October 2021 in South East Queensland and from June to October 2021 in North Queensland. The drones will fly at most of the trial beaches until 30 January 2022 while an evaluation of the trial is underway.

Fisheries Queensland is currently investigating options for drone flights to operate over the Summer 2021/22 school holidays while the evaluation is being considered.

DAF is investigating options to trial advanced camera technologies, such as multispectral cameras and to incorporate the use of artificial intelligence to assist with identifying animals spotted by the drones. It is important to be aware that drones are not suitable for all Queensland beaches. Drones cannot operate in airport exclusions zones, in some conditions (e.g rain and high winds) and their effectiveness is reduced when water clarity is poor. The use of drones can also be costly. These factors will all be considered in the final evaluation of the trial.

***Catch alert drumline trial*** - DAF is trialling catch alert drumlines at four beaches in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP) along the Capricorn Coast from September 2021. 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 GBRMP. A limitation of this equipment is that it cannot be operated at night to ensure contractor safety. The alert system is designed to ensure captured sharks can be released alive where possible. Evaluation of the effectiveness of this initial trial will inform any future expansion.

***Shark barrier trial in North Queensland*** - DAF, in partnership with the Federal Government, has commenced scoping works for a shark barrier trial in North Queensland - again as part of the joint commitment to trial alternatives in the GBRMP. Shark barriers, which create a swimming enclosure, are recommended for low energy beaches only and are not suitable for South-East Queensland conditions. They are yet to be assessed in other Queensland conditions. Such a solution can only work on beaches without significant wave, swell or current movement.

***Personal Electronic Deterrents*** - DAF has commissioned research into the assessment of 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 new research will help inform the suitability of the use of this technology in Queensland to further protect water users with little impact on marine species.

While each of these options has merit in protecting swimmers from sharks, it would not be appropriate to pre-empt the results and evaluation of the trials, and, as mentioned above, the Queensland Government will not change the existing program until/unless suitable alternatives are proven effective in local Queensland conditions.

I trust this information clarifies that alternatives to shark nets and drumlines are being investigated in Queensland. In the meantime, the Palaszczuk Government is committed to reviewing and adapting the current Program in line with emerging science to minimise the impacts of Program equipment on other marine life. For example, the Program recently implemented the latest technology in acoustic whale alarms to deter whales from approaching Program apparatus. These alarms are fitted to all shark nets and some drumlines in Queensland during the whale migration season, but are not fully effective in preventing entanglements. The aim is to reduce the risk of entanglements while continuing to ensure water users' safety is not compromised.

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 safely release marine animals from shark control 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.

The Program is strongly supported by Local Governments, Surf Life Saving Queensland, local businesses, and the tourism industry. As the Program cannot entirely avert the risk of a shark bite, and not all of Queensland can be protected, Queenslanders are called upon to do their part and be SharkSmart. Every time they are on or in the water, Queenslanders are asked to follow these SharkSmart tips:

- 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 and avoid schools of bait fish or diving birds
- Keep fish waste and food scraps out of the water where people swim.
- Swim in clear water away from fishers.

More information about the Program is available online at [www.fisheries.qld.gov.au](http://www.fisheries.qld.gov.au).

I trust this information is of assistance to the petitioners who have an interest in this matter. If your office would like further information, please contact my office on 07 3719 7420.

Yours sincerely



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