

POL 0064: Shark Hazard Response

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to –

1. Provide direction for responding to shark interactions and shark sightings, as well as the broader approach to water safety warnings and information provided to the public.
2. Guide the administration of the Shire of Esperance Property Local Law 2009, under which a sign may be erected to regulate, prohibit or restrict specific activities on the beach or in the water and the giving of directions to swimmers to leave the water if a shark is suspected of being in the vicinity of the beach.

Scope

This policy applies to beach areas under the care, control or management of the Shire of Esperance.

Definitions

Authorised Person: means the Chief Executive Officer or a person or class of persons appointed under section 9.10 of the *Local Government Act 1995* for the purpose of administering the Shire of Esperance Property Local Law 2009

DPIRD: mean Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

DBCA: means Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions – Parks and Wildlife Service

Patrolled Beach: means a beach that has a SLSWA beach safety and surveillance service in operation.

Shark Interaction: means an incident where a shark bumps, nudges, chases or attacks or person

SLSWA: means Surf Life Saving Western Australia

Unverified Shark Sighting: means a shark sighting reported to the Shire from Water Police WA and forwarded to the Shire from the Water Police WA.

Verified Shark Sighting: means a shark sighting reported to the Shire from WA Government Shark Monitoring Network, that is tagged shark detected through the shark monitoring network

In determining the level of shark response, the following Beach Categories and summary response protocols have been established.

Beach Categories

Category 1: Patrolled by SLSWA, Beach Life Guards (during vacation swimming lessons) or VacSwim educators

Response: Evacuate / close beach – re-open 1 hour post last sighting. Warning sign in place for 24 hours.

Category 2: Not patrolled, easy road access, regularly populated, car parking and amenities provided.

Response: Notify beach goers as soon as practicable. Post signage indicating recent shark sighting / activity. If frequency > 4 times/annum, consider permanently beach signage. Remove signage 2 hours post last sighting. Warning sign in place for 24 hours.

Category 3: Not patrolled. Access available but not regularly occupied by crowds, no amenities.

Response: As soon as practicable, post signage indicating recent shark sighting/activity. If frequency > 4 times/annum, consider permanently sign beach.

Category 4: Not patrolled. Remote, limited access, no amenities, not thought to have crowds of 10 persons or more.

Response: If practicable, post signage indicating recent shark sighting/activity. If frequency > 4 times/annum, consider permanently sign beach.

Practice

The Chief Executive Officer will prepare a more detailed internal procedures/protocol to supplement this policy and to guide operational staff in the exercise of their functions. The Chief Executive Officer will consult with Councillors as appropriate in the development of those procedures/protocol.

The policy acknowledges the length of the Esperance coastline. Beaches have been categorized using factors such as SLSWA patrols, vacation swimming, access and use. Response to shark sightings at the different categories are reflective of these factors.

This policy recognises that at a beach patrolled by SLSWA, the on duty life saver will be responsible for implementing shark sighting response in accordance with the SLSWA standard operating procedures. In addition Rangers will respond advising beach users and the shark sighting and place signs (warning or beach closed) 1kilometre either side of the sighting.

The Shire will be responsible for activation of Shark Warning Towers (Spectur) at Kelp Beds, West and Twilight Beaches where an unverified shark sighting has been reported. (Note: Verified (detected) shark triggers an automatic activation of the Shark Warning Tower at the relevant beaches).

Surfcomm will be notified by Rangers when Shark Warning Tower is activated on SLSWA patrolled beaches when they are patrolled.

The Shire will engage with SLSWA with the aim of updating coastal risk and safety signage.

Shark sighting reports received by the Shire through the Shark Monitoring Network generally provide details about the location of the shark, species, size and in some instances direction of travel, which are essential for making decisions about swimmer

safety. The Shark Monitoring Network service available will inform the Shire's response to a shark sighting.

Shark sighting reports received by the Shire from the WA Water Police will be assessed acknowledging the source of the information i.e. a public report.

In the event of a shark attack fatality, WA Police are the lead agency. The Shire will provide assistance with the management of the shark attack and implement beach safety measures as considered necessary and under the direction of the WA Police.

Where a direction is given to swimmers to leave the water following a shark attack, the decision to re-opening a beach for swimming shall occur after consultation with lead agencies.

Policy recognizes the need for improving community awareness and education about the shared responsibility of risk. The Shire will actively promote -

1. Report Shark Sightings to Water Police on 9442 8600;
2. WA Governments Shark Smart website; and,
3. Other communication mechanisms to inform the community of recent reports of shark activity/management.

Policy Content

At a Patrolled Beach, when the beach is patrolled, an SLSWA life guard is the authorised person for responding to a shark sighting and for implementing the SLSWA response procedure which may include sounding alarms* to alert swimmers, clearing the water of swimmers and monitoring shark presence.

* Note – this alarm is separate to the Shark Warning Tower (Spectur) system managed by Shire Rangers.

All shark sightings are to be reported to Water Police on 9442 8600.

Due to the minimal risk associated, if the shark sighted is less than 2 metres in total length, the Shire will monitor but maintain normal operations and not take any action.

The Shire may also mobilise as outlined below in the event of an Unverified Shark Sighting to minimize risk to the community -

1. The Shire will be responsible for activation of Shark Warning Towers (Spectur) at Kelp Beds, West Beach and Twilight Beach
2. If the shark sighted is greater than 2 metres in total length and less than 500 meters from the shore, temporary signage is to be placed on the beach immediately adjacent to the shark sighting location, at intervals of approximately 500 metres and/or on key beach entry points, for a distance of approximately 1000 meters from a point on the beach immediately adjacent to the shark sighting location.
3. Warning Signage installed on a beach or access points to a beach will remain in place for at least 24 hours from the time of the last notification after the last shark sighting. Beach Closed signage, when installed, will remain in place for a

minimum of 1 hour post last sighting for Category 1 Beach or a minimum of 2 hour post last sighting for Category 2 Beach.

Shark Interaction at Shire Managed / Controlled Beaches) -

1. Where there is a shark interaction i.e. bump/nudge/chase, the beach maybe closed by Authorised Persons.
2. Where a shark attack fatality occurs, the beach will be closed by Shire Authorised Person(s) under the direction of the Incident Controller. The beach will re-open 48 hours post incident.
3. Incident Controller, managing the incident, will provide direction to Shire response activity, (i.e. beach closure, manned or unmanned) until responsibility of land management is returned to the Shire.
4. The Shire will consult with relevant agencies in the consideration of activities that may include the re-opening of beaches after an incident has occurred.
5. Shark Warning Tower activated (Mode 2 – Evacuation) by Shire authorised persons.
6. In the event that the Twilight Beach Shark Warning Tower is activated an authorised person will notify SurfCom on 137873.
7. Beach closed signs will be erected at critical locations car park / beach entry points as soon as practicable to notify beach goers of the potential danger and beach closure.
8. An Authorised Person or support agencies will also patrol the relevant beach area one kilometre each side of the attack to notify beach goers of the potential danger.
9. Where it is identified that the public is in clear immediate danger from shark threat, an Authorised Person will endeavour to notify the public via the use of a vehicle horn, air siren or whistle, where available and practical.
10. Where a shark interaction occurs, the Shire may consider installing permanent static signs to notify the public of the potential risk.
11. Permanent signage may contain relevant information provided by DPIRD and Surf Life Saving WA outlining safer water use practices / considerations.
12. If a shark interaction occurs between Bandy Creek Boat Harbour and Cape Le Grand National Park an authorised person will notify DBCA on 9083 2100.

Community awareness of shark hazard will be promoted by -

1. Providing information on the Shire website about how to access recent reports of shark activity from the WA Government information and encourage swimmers to SLSWA patrolled beaches.
2. Installing permanent signage at key beach car parks to inform and promote to beach users, how to access the most recent information on local shark activity.
3. Temporary signage installed in accordance with this policy shall be used to inform beach users and swimmers that a shark has been sighted in the vicinity and provide information on how to access the latest shark sighting report information from the WA Government information and communication platforms.

Prioritisation of response activities

Shire Rangers / Authorised Persons will respond to shark sightings as a matter of priority, except where currently engaged in or mobilised to respond to the following -

1. Fire / emergency;
2. Dog attack on person; or
3. Stock on road.

Where priority activities divert Shire resources from dealing with immediate shark matters, secondary support resources will be activated as soon as possible to assist from the following -

1. Other on-duty Shire Ranger / other Authorised Persons;
2. WA Police and other Emergency Service agencies (where relevant);
3. Other Shire Services as required.

Record Management

Responding Authorised Persons are required to collate and archive records containing the following -

1. Date, location, type, size and time of shark sighting / attack and summary of activities undertaken in each instance.

The Rangers will also collate and maintain a record of -

1. Number of shark related activations within each financial year;
2. Number of shark related closures within each financial year;
3. Number of shark attacks in each financial year.

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Document Information

Responsible Position	Manager Ranger and Emergency Services
Risk Rating	High

Referencing Documents

- *Local Government Act 1995*
- Shire of Esperance Property Local Law 2009

Revision History

Date	Version	CM Reference	Reason for Change	Resolution #	Next Review
Jun 2020	1	D20/15285	New policy	O02620-184	Jun 2022
Dec 2021	2	D20/15285[v2]	Remove attacks and replace with interactions in 1.1 under Purpose. Include definition of interaction. Updates to wording throughout.	O1221-225	Dec 2023
Feb 2024	3	D20/15285[v3]	Simplify scope. Include definitions of DPIRD, DBCA	O0224-018	Feb 2026

Feb 2026	4	D20/15285[v4]	and beach categories. Include 'shark interactions at Shire managed/controlled beaches', 'prioritisation of response activities' and 'record management' sections. Amend responsible officer position. Biennial review, no change.	O0226-031	Feb 2028
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