

NSW Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program

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How can you reduce the chance of a shark interaction?

While shark interactions are rare events, there is a risk inherent in swimming in any waterway. The only way that you can 100% guarantee you will not have a shark interaction is not to go into the water.

The fact is that the ocean is the sharks' domain. Sharks are a natural and important part of the ocean environment, and when we enter open waters we are entering their domain – not a swimming pool.

No program or combinations of programs in open waters can ever totally eliminate shark interactions.

One of the simplest things swimmers can do is to stay between the flags when swimming at the beach. This is the best place to swim because the area is patrolled and observed by lifesavers and lifeguards who are there to monitor risks and maximise swimmer safety.

Other steps to improve safety at the beach include:

- Don't swim too far from shore – this will isolate you.
- Avoid swimming when it's dark or during twilight hours when most sharks are more active and have a sensory advantage.
- Avoid murky water, waters with known effluents or sewage and areas that are being used by recreational or commercial fishers.
- Avoid areas with signs of baitfish or fish feeding activity on the surface – diving seabirds are a good indicator of such activity.
- Do not rely on sightings of dolphins to indicate the absence of sharks – both often feed together on the same food.
- Be aware that sharks may be present between sandbars or near steep drop offs.

- Avoid swimming in canals, and swimming or surfing in river/harbour mouths.
- Do not swim near or interfere with shark nets.

For more information on sharks, minimising the risks, statistics and maps, please see:

SharkSmart – know the risks and minimise your chance of a close encounter with a shark:

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/info/sharksmart

Australian Shark Attack File

taronga.org.au/animals-conservation/conservation-science/australian-shark-attack-file/australian-shark-attack-file

International Shark Attack File

www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/sharks/isaf/isaf.htm

Global Shark Attack File

www.sharkattackfile.net/index.htm

Surf Life Saving NSW

www.beachsafe.org.au

The NSW shark meshing program

The NSW Government's Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program (SMP) is a public safety measure introduced in 1937 to reduce the chances of shark interactions at the State's most popular public bathing beaches. More than 3 million people visit these beaches each year.

Under the program, 51 beaches between Newcastle and Wollongong are netted by contractors using specially designed meshing nets to reduce the chances of shark interactions.

The nets do not stretch from one end of a beach to the other. They are not designed to create a total barrier between bathers and sharks – they are designed to reduce the chances of dangerous

sharks aggregating near meshed beaches, thereby reducing the chances of a shark interaction.

While the nets cannot provide a guarantee that a shark interaction will never happen, we believe they have been effective in greatly reducing the potential number of interactions.

Since the NSW shark meshing program was put in place in Sydney in 1937, there has only been one fatality due to shark bite on a meshed beach. That fatality occurred at Merewether Beach, Newcastle, in 1951.

Before the program was in place, during the period from 1900 to 1936, there was an average of one fatal shark interaction per year in NSW waters.

Gear and deployment

Specialist contractors carry out shark meshing operations. The nets are 150 metres long by 6 metres deep and have a mesh size of 60 cm. They are a 'sunk net' set below the surface in about 10 to 12 metres of water, within 500 metres of the shore.

The nets are anchored to the sea bed with only the floats and ropes at the surface. People should not swim near the nets, nor handle or otherwise interfere with the nets due to the risk of injury or underwater entanglement.

For these reasons, it is an offence to interfere with, vandalise, or otherwise make the nets in any way ineffective or inoperable and currently carries a maximum penalty of \$5500.

The meshing season runs from 1 September to 30 April the following year. The nets are not in place from May to August during the majority of the whale migration season.

Setting nets in our highly dynamic coastal waters also means that nets may not be in place on every beach, every day due to strong waves or currents.

The nets are regularly checked by contractors (weather permitting at least every 72 hours) for maintenance purposes and to see if there is any

marine life caught in the nets. Contractors are required to free all live marine life found in the nets where it is practical and safe to do so.

The location of the shark meshing nets is determined by the prevailing and forecast wind, and sea conditions and currents, but are generally set parallel to beaches near the surf clubs and patrolled swimming areas.

Minimising impacts on other marine life

While the NSW Government remains committed to its shark meshing program, it is also committed to reducing the impact on marine life.

The Government is also continually monitoring developments and emerging technologies that seek to increase bather safety whilst minimising environmental impacts.

Some impact mitigation measures that are applied to the shark meshing program include:

- Since 2009 the program has been authorised by [Joint Management Agreements](#) under the state's threatened species legislation and managed in accordance with the associated Management Plan.
- Nets are fitted with 'whale alarms' and 'dolphin pingers' to deter these marine mammals from the nets.
- The Management Plan also includes provisions to remove the nets (and notify the public) if there is a high risk of entanglement of whales or dugongs.
- Nets are set near the sea bed, in about 10 to 12 metres of water, which reduces potential impacts on air breathing animals such as whales, dolphins and turtles.
- Shark meshing nets are not in place during the majority of the whale migration season from May to August.

Figure 1. The 7 regions and 51 beaches of the NSW Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program.

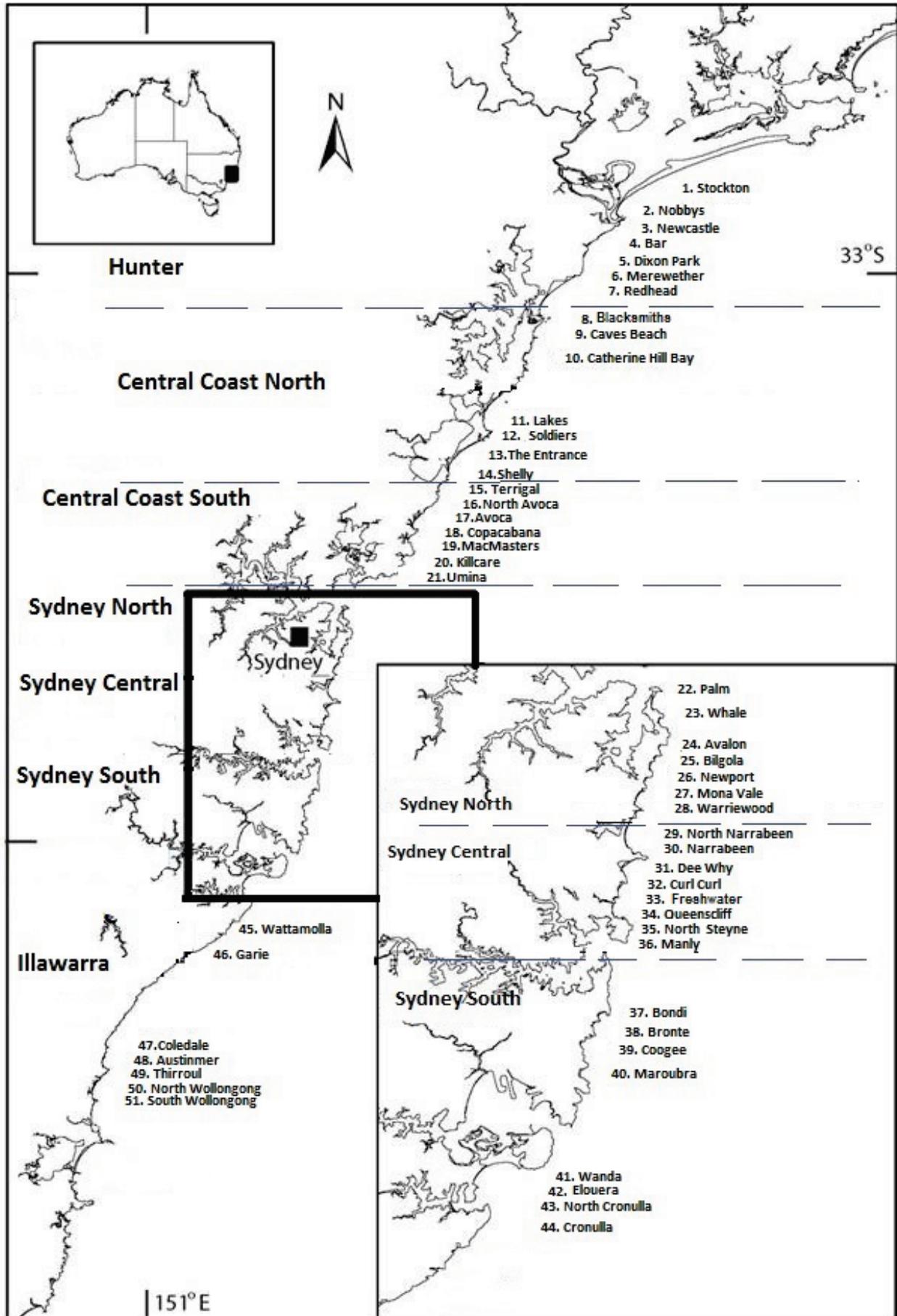


Table 1. The 7 regions and 51 beaches of the NSW Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program

Newcastle	Central Coast North	Central Coast South	Sydney North
1. Stockton	8. Blacksmiths	15. Terrigal	22. Palm
2. Nobbys	9. Caves Beach	16. North Avoca	23. Whale
3. Newcastle	10. Catherine Hill Bay	17. Avoca	24. Avalon
4. Bar	11. Lakes	18. Copacabana	25. Bilgola
5. Dixon Park	12. Soldiers	19. MacMasters	26. Newport
6. Merewether	13. The Entrance	20. Killcare	27. Mona Vale
7. Redhead	14. Shelly	21. Umina	28. Warriewood
Sydney Central	Sydney South	Illawarra	
29. North Narrabeen	37. Bondi	45. Wattamolla	
30. Narrabeen	38. Bronte	46. Garie	
31. Dee Why	39. Coogee	47. Coledale	
32. Curl Curl	40. Maroubra	48. Austinmer	
33. Freshwater	41. Wanda	49. Thirroul	
34. Queenscliff	42. Elouera	50. North Wollongong	
35. North Steyne	43. North Cronulla	51. South Wollongong	
36. Manly	44. Cronulla	--	

For updates go to www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/factsheets

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