



Niall Blair

Minister for Primary Industries
Minister for Regional Water
Minister for Trade and Industry

MEDIA RELEASE

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SAVING LIVES WITH EYES IN THE SKY

The NSW Government's summer drone and helicopter surveillance programs have highlighted their effectiveness in reducing the risk of shark attacks on NSW beaches.

NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Niall Blair said pilots were kept busy right along the NSW coastline, with both drones and helicopters making a number of shark sightings.

"The drone trial sighted 46 potentially dangerous sharks, while our helicopter crews reported 525 - on 167 occasions, the helicopter crews notified beach authorities when a shark was in close proximity to beachgoers," Mr Blair said.

"A total of 78 water evacuations were initiated by helicopter crews when sharks were within 100m of water users, 8 evacuations were also made by drones.

"Our pilots flew a staggering 92,929km over the holiday period and carried purpose-built radios for direct communication with beach authorities, plus a siren and PA system to communicate with those in the water.

"These eyes in the sky have really complemented our other measures under the \$16m shark management strategy, which include our tagging program, net trial, SMART drumlines and VR4G listening stations."

Drone flights took place every day of the school holidays (weather permitting) at Ballina, Lennox Head, Evans Head, Redhead and Kiama.

The drone at Kiama was also successfully used in the rescue operation of two swimmers who were at risk of being swept out to sea, (in January 2017).

The drone pilots were the first to spot the distressed swimmers, reported the situation to local authorities, and subsequently monitored one swimmer until they were safely ashore again.

"This highlights the multifaceted benefit of using drones in enhancing overall beach safety in our coastal waters," Mr Blair said.

"As drone technology continues to rapidly develop and the cost of operating them declines, it presents a unique opportunity for the NSW Government to work with local governments and explore options for their future use in shark mitigation measures."

For access to new drone vision and stills, please contact:

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