

Shark Cull Extended Trial

Drawing the line at Shark Bites

Public Relations Plan for the West Australian State Government



Image: <http://hdw.eweb4.com/out/1020728.html>

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September 2014

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Executive Summary

In response to seven fatal shark attacks in Western Australia in three years, the state government instituted a shark hazard mitigation strategy, including drum line culling. Despite similar programs existing in Queensland and New South Wales for decades, public reaction to the news was emotive and negative. The challenge for the government has been to counter negative publicity while offering a viable solution to ensure water user safety and mitigate public perceptions of a problem. The initial three-month trial is complete. There is now a need to effectively promote the extension of the trial. This report details the suggested public relations strategy.

Government consultation with stakeholders post initial trial suggests that conservation groups are against the trial, and water user groups are in favour. Some groups support the trial yet feel unable to voice this in the public sphere due to negative publicity. The issue is emotive and needs a sensitive strategy. It also appears there is misunderstanding with regard to facts of the trial and of the overall hazard mitigation strategy. Work has been done to successfully minimise environmental fallout of the program and by-catch, yet this is not widely known.

This public relations strategy seeks to engage publics with a positive campaign that focuses on education and safety measures, allowing water users to feel confident in the water. Water users and water user groups will be the primary audience, with secondary publics of businesses and local councils in areas close to the trials.

The extension of the trial will be framed as a minimal and temporary measure until other responses within the greater program become viable. The outcome sought from the campaign is increased public support for an extension of the trial.

The public relations campaign will use a breadth of tactics, including information pamphlets, electronic media and beach events with key partners. The campaign duration is eleven weeks with a budget of \$58,900.

A report on the campaign outcomes will be submitted two weeks after the campaign is executed.

Situation Analysis

The following section of the report provides an assessment of the current state of the drum line policy.

SWOT Analysis

Table 1 – SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Part of comprehensive / wider policy• Active response to 10 deaths in 10 years (7 in last 3.5)• World leading system in reducing by-catch – now to be copied by other programs worldwide• Small area and short duration of program only through critical months and locations• Lower environmental risk compared to other programs in other jurisdictions• Policy has resulted in no deaths since implementation• Policy has resulted in fewer beach closures during trial	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor promotion of overall mitigation strategy• Benefits and research are not well publicised• Research of culling effectiveness is weak• Too little data from a short trial to adequately measure reduction in risk• Criticism of high cost for little perceived return• Some species are endangered – environmentally irresponsible to cull• High program cost diverts funds from potential research• Sharks and ecosystem are not fully understood• Perceived political grandstanding by Premier
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research opportunities – tagging and study of sharks• Similar NSW and QLD program is not publicly criticised• Ocean user groups support the program• Highlight program intent of protecting beach users, not primarily killing sharks• Improve community engagement with targeted campaign• Promote ‘SharkSmart’ website and media fact sheets	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase in beach use means more potential for deaths without adequate hazard prevention measures• Trends show increase in unprovoked attacks – science is unsure why• Public pressure and emotive activism• UMR research poll: 82% Australians oppose cull• Highly visible and emotive media and protests• Scientific concern / opposition

History of Shark attack in Western Australia

The recent fatal shark attacks prompted the West Australian government to institute a policy of baited drum lines in an effort to promote water user safety. There is insufficient data to explain the increase in recent shark attacks which is thought to be due to a number of factors: an increase in seal and white shark populations, whale migrations and changes in water temperature amongst other factors. Hazard mitigation therefore is a complex issue with no simple solution (Government of Western Australia, Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), 2014).

Government and political climate

The West Australian government considers its primary concern is water user safety, and protection of the tourism industry. To this end it has instituted a multi pronged program in consultation with various stakeholders: The Commonwealth Department of the Environment (DoE), Department of Fisheries (DoF) and the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW), as well as ocean user groups and academia. A number of existing national and international shark control programs were investigated during design and implementation (DPC, 2014).

Program key statistics

According to the DPC (2014), a total of \$22m has been committed to the program until 2016, of which, \$1.28m was for the drum line program. The program has resulted in fewer beach closures and the capture of 172 sharks, 99 of which were tagged and released. See Appendix 1 for detailed statistics.

Program Media communications

DPC communications in relation to the drum lines program comprised of a number of media releases, establishment of the 'SharkSmart' website and a program review by DPC released in June 2014. See Appendix 2 for details.

The DPC (2014) review concluded that media and public interest could have been handled more effectively with more information available through a wider variety of formats. Some business groups did not support a large communication effort that could give the perception of a problem.

Media coverage

The program has resulted in significant media coverage, both in traditional and social media, much of it emotive and unfavourable. DPC stakeholder feedback has identified that some groups supporting the policy have not felt it wise to comment publicly due to fears of media and public backlash (DPC, 2014). Perception of Premier Barnett is that the campaign is politically motivated in part due to tenuous polling and that communication of the program has been poor (Murphy, 2014).

Favourable interest groups and publics

According to DPC (2014) ocean user groups are generally in favour of the policy. Surfing WA in particular has been vocal about their support for the program.

South African, New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland (QLD) governments' shark programs have shown interest in the program lines and hooks, which have remarkably low by-catch numbers (DPC, 2014).

Opposing interest groups and publics

Academics and conservation groups generally oppose the program, with Sea Shepherd being particularly vocal (SeaShepherd.org, 2014). A detailed list can be found in Appendix 4.

Public perception

Public perception is generally against the program. Eighty two per cent of people surveyed by UMR Research (500 surveyed), believe that sharks should not be killed and people enter the water at their own risk (Dorling, 2014).

On 4 January 2014, 4000 people gathered at Perth's Cottesloe beach to protest the trial. February 1st saw a national day of action with 6000 demonstrating at Cottesloe, 2000 at Manly in Sydney and more at 11 other sites around Australia. Social media and the Internet have been used well by groups to publicise their message (King, 2014).

It is clear there is significant public opposition which may be concerning. There is some discussion of other successful, established programs in QLD and NSW (McPhee, 2012), yet very little criticism of them, suggesting that public education and balance in media reporting may moderate the strong public response. See Appendix 3 for a detailed media review.

Legislation

An Environment Protection Authority (EPA) review was not required as the trial was minimal in duration and geographic scope ("WA Shark Cull," 2014). Exceptions and licenses under Commonwealth and State legislation were granted for the trial as some shark species (Great White) are protected (McPhee, 2012).

Research and scientific consensus

Scientific consensus is that more research is needed on shark behaviour and why they attack humans. DPC (2014) review details the research that went into designing the program, of which there was some contribution from the scientific community.

Public relation (PR) opportunity / problem

To convince the people of WA that extending the cull is an appropriate measure until further research and hazard mitigation strategies become available.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

The goal of the campaign is to ensure water users feel confident entering the water in WA, which will be achieved with the objectives listed below.

Output Objectives

1. To create an information pamphlet to be distributed to water users, water user groups and associations throughout the campaign.
2. To create three, one minute web videos for YouTube and 'SharkSmart' website to publicise key messages.
3. To partner with three key events (one per month in the period October to December 2014) in the WA surfing calendar to promote 'SharkSmart' website, campaign videos and key campaign messages.
4. To create PR releases for key campaign messages and events.

Outcome Objectives

The outcome objectives are to achieve the following:

1. To increase public support for an extension to the trial by 20% by 15 December, 2014.
2. To raise awareness of entire program via increase in 'SharkSmart' website traffic by 20% by 15 December, 2014.
3. To increase the number of downloads of 'Beachsafe App' by 10% by 15 December, 2014.

Key Target Publics

Primary Publics

Primary audiences for this campaign are water users and water user groups. See Appendix 5 for a list of associations and groups.

There is some support for the trial extension already within some of these groups, as they feel most at risk due to their higher water usage. It is anticipated that through these groups and associations, contacts to the wider community will be made.

Secondary Publics

These publics are concerned that publicising drum lines and hazard mitigation strategies promote the idea of a problem and may negatively impact businesses and water user participation.

Key secondary publics in vicinity of Marine Monitored Areas (MMA) are:

- Surf, dive and tackle shops
- Local councils
- Café's and restaurants

These groups want policies that do not alarm, yet give the clear message that the government is working to ensure water user safety. They may be open to messages that promote the greater policy and highlight the benefits and environmental soundness of the trial; particularly until other hazard strategies are available.

Key media, political, celebrity and local identities that may support the policy are:

- Ian Campbell – Former Federal Environment Minister
- Mat Manners – Margaret River Surfboard maker
- Chris Kenny – Associate Editor of The Australian
- Karl Mathiesen – The Eco Audit, The Guardian

These people have all spoken favourably or moderately about the trial in public forums and may be potential allies in the media. Association members within the groups listed above may be open to promoting key messages within their local communities. According to the DCP (2014), some academics understood the rationale for the trial. Perhaps some may be interested in publicly commenting favourably or moderately.

Key Messages

Overarching Message

The overarching message of the campaign targeted to primary and secondary publics is:

The trial extension is an interim measure until other strategies are proven and tested.

There are a number of non-lethal strategies currently being tested. Some are not yet commercially viable or have unintended consequences, such as sonar. The program has investigated them and will continue to provide resources and funding. Until other options are developed the trial exists to fill the gap. The trial will also provide more research opportunities and data, which will help the overall strategy.

Secondary messages

Two secondary messages are proposed. The first message is targeted to primary publics. The second is targeted to both primary and secondary publics:

1. The aim of the trial is to save human lives.

Highlight QLD and NSW programs that have resulted in fewer attacks and fatalities since they were installed. News stories and campaign video on past victims and their lives will humanise the debate and allow a reframing from the shark as victim, to the human toll.

2. That the tactics employed by the program are world's best practice in reducing by-catch.

Greater public awareness of the low numbers of by-catch; training of fisheries officers; consultation and line design to ensure minimal harm to sharks caught and released; and the minimal geographic and environmental footprint of the trial will give target publics greater confidence in the trial purpose and increase engagement.

Program

The eleven-week campaign will begin on 22 October 2014. The program tactics, schedules and budget are detailed below.

Tactics

Pamphlet

A pamphlet detailing the program will provide information on:

- Research being undertaken
- Environmental best practice
- 'SharkSmart' website
- 'Beach Safe' app

The pamphlet (5000 copies, initial run) will be delivered to surf, bait and tackle shops, water user groups / associations and councils in the vicinity of MMA's. It will also be available at key WA surfing events in the summer calendar.

Video

Three, one minute video spots to be placed on YouTube and the 'SharkSmart' website. Tone is factual and humanising:

- **Video 1:** Trial is an interim measure until research provides viable alternatives. Examples other measures in place. Link to 'SharkSmart' website with full details.
- **Video 2:** Remembering people who have lost their lives. Let's work together to minimise risk. Link to 'Beach Safe' app.
- **Video 3:** How the trial is environmentally world leading in minimising by-catch and raising post catch survival. Link to 'SharkSmart' website.

Social Media

It is anticipated that the campaign will generate considerable social media. In the past this has been poorly handled. Two dedicated social media / Twitter staff will monitor communications, particularly around event/video launches and respond with facts where appropriate.

The strategy will involve researching social media to assess the triggers and potential issues; creating a suggested responses bank; posting and timelines plan; staff training in posting best practice and social media client 'Buffer'; staff timetable for launch times and real time communication to program leader at critical times for risk mitigation.

Events

Video launches will be timed to coincide with three surfing events in the Surfing WA calendar:

- 'Rip Curl' GromSearch at Trigg Beach, Perth – 10-12 October 2014
- Margaret River Classic at Surfer's Point – 31 October – 2 November 2014
- Australian Junior Surfing Titles at Yallingup – 1-7 December 2014

Given the contentious public discourse around the issue, Surfing Associations and Rip Curl may not wish to be publicly associated with the campaign. Suggested approach is to focus on the education opportunity for surfers, their families and general publics, with primary focus on the entire program, minimal risk in general and best practice safety protocols.

In the event organisers do not wish to be formally associated with the campaign, suggest stories in leading local and daily newspapers a week before each event.

Website

Three videos will be uploaded to the 'SharkSmart' website and dedicated YouTube channel to coincide with the first day of each surfing event. Blogger outreach to online surfing, fishing and recreational publications; local council and association websites; and general newspapers in the preceding week would help build exposure. Suggested contacts are in listed in Appendix 6.


Editorial

PR releases for each video, coinciding surf event and overall program will be released to the media to publicise the program. Publications and bloggers in: surfing; fishing; water recreational; schools; local councils and daily newspapers, will be targeted.

Activity Schedule

Table 2 – Gantt chart

Tactic	Responsibility	Week 1 22/10/14	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4 (Review)	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8 (Review)	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11
Pamphlet	AB											
Video	HD											
Social Media	CJ, MK, LG											
Events	AB, CJ											
Website & Survey	HD											
Editorial	CJ											

 = week of campaign activity

Budget

Table 3 below provides an estimate at current pricing, which may change.

Table 3 – Budget

Tactic	Item	Expenditure \$	Income \$	Net Expenditure \$
Pamphlet	Photographer Designer Printing (per/ 5000)	700 1,000 700		2,400
Video	Creative Production YouTube Advertising	10,000 20,000 5,000	5,000	30,000
Social Media	Additional Staff	10,000		10,000
Events	Signage Photographer Set up and delivery	5,000 2,000 2,000		9,000
Website & Survey	Freelancer / coding UMR surveys	3,000 2,000		5,000
Editorial	Freelancer	2,500		2,500
Total \$				58,900

Evaluation

Evaluation will occur prior to campaign commencement, during and post. A final report detailing the campaign results is expected two weeks after completion.

Survey public opinion

A UMR survey of key publics in MMA areas at the start and end of the campaign will determine level of support for, and understanding of:

- Trial extension
- Entire program

SharkSmart Website Traffic

Google Analytics to gauge 'SharkSmart' site traffic numbers at start and end of campaign. Also, weekly reports throughout the launch to gauge response and ascertain if videos and events result in traffic surges.

YouTube channel

Tracking YouTube channel hits at campaign start and end, as well as weekly reports to track surges after each launch.

'Beach Safe' app downloads

Confirm figures for download of Beach Safe app, before and at end of campaign.

Appendices

1. WA Government Shark Hazard Mitigation Program – Key Statistics

Data from WA Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) Review: Western Australia Shark Hazard Mitigation Drum Line Program 2013-14 (2014).

Since 2008:

- \$22m committed up to 2105-2016
- Broad range of shark hazard mitigation measures:
 - Aerial and beach surveillance
 - Beach enclosure trials
 - Community awareness and education
 - Tagging and research initiatives
- \$1.28m for drum line program
 - 25 Jan – 30 Apr 2014 initial test period
 - Maximum of 60 static baited drum lines
 - Within two Marine Monitored Areas (MMA) – metropolitan and south west beaches of Western Australia
 - 1km offshore
 - Monitored from 6am-6pm, 7 days a week
 - Targeting: white, tiger and bull sharks – 3 meters in length or greater
 - Measures undertaken to minimise environmental impacts and by-catch (non-shark species)
- Results to date
 - 172 sharks caught
 - 50 sharks, 3 meters or greater were caught
 - Most were tiger sharks
 - 99 were tagged and released
 - Minimal by-catch as a result of environmental protections
 - Fewer beach closures – down from 131 closures in 2012-13 to 93 in 2013-14

2. DPC Communications

Communications issued by the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) (2014) in relation to the drum lines program:

- 6 media statements quoting 'drum lines' on 'http://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au' website between September 2012 – June 2014
- Program Review on <http://www.dpc.wa.gov.au>

Communications

- SharkSmart.com.au website providing:
 - Information and mitigation strategies for the public
 - Near real-time alerts of tagged sharks on detection map
- Surf Lifesaving WA Twitter account for live sightings

3. DPC Review of Media Coverage on Drum Lines Policy

From the DPC review (2014):

- 765 separate articles on sharks in local, state and national newspapers;
- 1,100 radio news bulletins on sharks (Western Australia);
- 850 radio talk back comments on sharks (Western Australia);
- 290 television news items on sharks (Western Australia);
- 286,000 emails and letters to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) on sharks (a significant number of which were pro forma emails)
- 20,000 submissions to the EPA from the public regarding the trial

A significant portion related to the drum line policy, some articles were shark sightings.

4. Groups and Academics opposed to Drum Line Policy

Groups:

- Sea Shepherd
- Australian Marine Conservation Society
- Conservation Council of WA

Academics:

- Daryl MacPhee (Bond University)
- Jessica Meeuwig (University of WA)
- Colin Simpfendorfer (James Cook University)
- Christopher Neff (University of Sydney), amongst others

Online:

- The Conversation (TheConversation.com)
- Social media – Change.org

5. List of Key Target Publics

- Water user groups:
 - WA Undersea Club
 - Open Ocean Swimmers
 - EventsCorp WA
- Surfers and surfing associations:
 - WA Sports Federation
 - Margaret River Board riders
 - Margaret River Recreational Surfers
 - Yallingup Board Riders Club
- Life saving groups and associations:
 - Surf Life Saving WA
- Fishing groups
 - RecFishWest

6. Potential Blogger and Publication List

- Water user groups listed in Appendix 5
- Surfinglife.com.au
- Surfingworld.com.au
- Fishingworld.com.au
- Nafa.com.au
- Ausfish.com.au
- Fishingwa.com
- Westernangleer.com.au
- Various surfing bloggers: e.g. Mick Fanning, that can be found on mushburger.com

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