

# Shark management measures in the Great Barrier Reef: A tourism industry statement

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The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is vast and diverse in its geography and it is one of the most inspiring wilderness areas on the planet. It is attracting millions of visitors every year with its beauty and ecological integrity and remains as one of Australia's most effective visitor drawcards. It is also recognised as a World Heritage Area for its unique natural attributes.

Human life is of primary importance to the community and to the tourism industry. The safety and wellbeing of visitors is every tourism operator's number one priority. Australia's reputation as a safe destination is a critical competitive advantage for our destination. This reputation is not built on a claim that accidents cannot happen here but on an implied assurance we have in place appropriate precautionary measures for all circumstances and that we respond compassionately and professionally to any incident. Marine tourism operators along Queensland's coast have a demonstrated commitment to the highest level of visitor care possible.

We accept that visiting any natural environment and any interaction with wildlife requires appropriate awareness for operators and visitors, based on accurate information. It also calls for behavioural guidelines and adequate precautions to be put in place. Unfortunately, in the context of the recent incidents involving sharks in the Whitsundays, we have a very limited understanding of the scientific facts that might explain changes to shark behaviour or movements in the different locations visited by tourism operators across the Great Barrier Reef.

Prior to the most recent shark incident, the ruling by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal put the spotlight on the use of shark control measures in the Great Barrier Marine Park and led to conflicting views being articulated at a political level. We urge all parties in this discussion to determine the way forward without unintended further damage to the travelling public's perception about the exposure to risk when visiting the Great Barrier Reef. Any unnecessarily alarming publicity has the potential to further damage a perception-driven tourism industry.

The Tribunal's decision allows for a progressive implementation of non-lethal alternatives appropriate for the long term. This could include smart drum lines, deterrent devices, aerial surveillance and barriers. It is worth noting that the Whitsundays, where the recent incidents have occurred, never had permanent drumlines installed. Nevertheless, as part of the Tribunal's transition process, we see no impediment to the state government reinstalling drum lines that have been removed in other areas recently, while working with experts on place-based trials of alternatives. Long term solutions will require a clearer understanding of shark movements and detailed analysis of the recent incidents.

Based on this knowledge, we will be in a better position to determine what measures can be taken to mitigate further risks in the diverse locations across our marine environment in the longer term. Guided by new scientific evidence, the industry is keen to work with government to implement improved and innovative management tools that can achieve better outcomes.

We do not support the proposition that Federal Legislation governing the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park should be amended. It is an unnecessary step to achieve the outcomes that are sought by both industry and we would suggest, by the community. At the same time, we encourage the Queensland Government to reinstate previous shark control programs as required and as permitted under current legislation and by the relevant permits issued by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA). The adverse implication of changing the GBRMPA Act could be far reaching and may have a detrimental bearing on the GBR's status as a World Heritage Area.



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