

AN OPEN LETTER TO:

Queensland Premier, Anastacia Palaszczuk  
Queensland Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Leanne Donaldson

Dear Anastacia and Leanne,

I hope this letter finds you well.

As you may already be aware, today, February 6th, 2016, I will begin a hunger strike with the ultimate goal of increasing the protection of both humans and marine life off the coast of Queensland, by proposing commitments for the state government to transition from the current Shark Control Program to non-lethal alternatives.

The reasons for the Hunger Strike:

1. The current Queensland Shark Control Program has a high impact on marine ecosystems off Queensland and does not discriminate between marine animal species. Implemented marine mammal deterrents do not have a high success rate (~40%) and still pose a significant threat to whales and dolphins.

The program in Queensland has captured more than 78,000 marine animals since 1962, including several species listed as vulnerable, endangered and critically endangered. The program is now listed as a Key Threatening Process for a number of Queensland species at risk of extinction.

2. The program has been implemented since 1962 and is utilising out-dated practices to mitigate shark-human encounters at popular beaches. Hundreds of scientists have spoken out over the past few years in opposition to the use of shark nets and drum lines, as there is no sound scientific evidence to suggest that they reduce the risk of shark bite, and there are now several non-lethal alternatives available to replace the current devices.

Please consider the below research on the effectiveness of the QLD Shark Control Program, published by Professor & Director, Centre for Marine Futures, University of Western Australia, Jessica Meeuwig.

<http://theconversation.com/has-queensland-really-saved-lives-by-killing-thousands-of-sharks-23437>

Scientists such as Daryl McPhee of Bond University and social scientist Dr Chris Neff are also other important individuals to liaise with in regards to the above statement.

3. The devices used in the Queensland Shark Control Program pose a direct threat to beach goers, with the risk of dislodgement of shark nets and drum lines (which caused the drowning death of a young boy in 1992 on the Gold Coast) as well as the risk to rescue crews tasked with disentangling large animals such as whales (one member of the Sea World rescue crew lost half a finger in 2015 during the rescue of a whale entangled in a shark net).

- In May, 2015, 11 shark nets were dislodged off the Gold Coast and Sunshine coast and became a direct threat to hundreds of beach goers, unaware of the dangers that these devices pose when loose. One shark net became dislodged within the surf zone at Burleigh Heads, and hundreds of surfers were in close vicinity of the net over approximately 6 days.

<http://www.sunshinecoastdaily.com.au/news/wild-weather-dislodges-shark-nets-along-coast/2626186/>

<http://www.goldcoastbulletin.com.au/lifestyle/pets-and-wildlife/unaware-gold-coast-board-riders-lucky-to-escape-dislodged-drum-lines-and-nets-after-storm/news-story/bef0ba2deb52db423ed969f8d7c057e0>

- In November, 2014, a member of the public at Palm Beach contacted me after discovering a drum line floating at his local beach, while he was swimming in the surf zone with his young daughter- there was no public announcement regarding the dislodgement of this drum line.

Another risk that the shark nets present is a 'false sense of security' for locals and tourists who are largely misinformed about how the shark nets and drum lines work. Many are under the impression that the nets enclose the entire beach, creating a 100% safe zone for swimmers and surfers. This of course is not the case and since 1962 there have been more than 30 instances of shark-human incidence on Queensland beaches with shark nets and drum lines implemented, one of these was fatal. Source:

<http://www.sharkattackfile.net/spreadsheets/GSAF5.xls>

I will be entering into a hunger strike by refraining the consumption of all food and liquid with the exception of water, beginning at 9am on Saturday the 6th of February, 2016.

The strike will continue until commitments are met by the Queensland State Government/ Department of Primary Industries to fund non-lethal alternatives and to commit to a phase out of current lethal devices over the coming years.

Requested commitments:

- A commitment of funding matching the NSW State Governments' recent funding commitment into the trial and implementation of non-lethal alternatives along Queensland popular beaches over the coming years.
- A commitment to phase out shark nets and drum lines along the Queensland coast over the coming years.

Until the Queensland State Government meets the above commitments, the hunger strike will continue.

I would be more than happy to travel to meet with either the Queensland Premier and/or the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries to discuss the above.

I hope your consideration of the above information results in the most optimal outcome for both humans and Queensland's iconic marine wildlife, which contributes so much to the state's tourism economy and intrinsic values.

Kind regards,

Nicole McLachlan