



Media Release

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For Immediate Release: **The Grey Nurse Shark Issue: science versus opinion**

The State Government funded Environmental Defender's Office (EDO) is representing the Nature Conservation Council (NCC) in proceedings in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) against the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Heritage. The NCC is presenting evidence to the Tribunal that the Ocean Trap and Line Fishery (OTLF) has a significant impact on the east coast population of the "critically endangered" grey nurse shark population. The NCC are claiming the current protection for the grey nurse shark does not go far enough, and are seeking 1500m exclusion zones around 18 grey nurse aggregation sites along the NSW coast.

The public may not realize it, but they are largely paying for this court action. The EDO is funded from Phil Koperberg's department which is used to provide advice, court actions and other legal procedures for the various environmental groups such as the NCC. The NPA and NCC also get significant funding from the State Government. Community conservation grants cost the tax payer of NSW between \$18m and \$25m in the 2006/07 budget.

Phil Ingram remarked " The French mathematician and physicist Henri Poincare said 'There are in fact two things, science and opinion; the former begets knowledge, the latter ignorance'. In 2002 the NCC were pushing for 1000m exclusions around grey nurse aggregation zones. In 2004 they were stating the grey nurse shark population was 300 and could be quasi-extinct in 6 years. In 2006 they were stating the grey nurse population was less than 500 and could be facing quasi-extinction in 10-20 years, and in 2007 are now pushing via legal channels for increased fishing exclusion zones of 1500m around 18 known aggregation areas. It seems the NCC want greater restrictions the more the grey nurse numbers appear to recover. And their court action indicates a shift in their direction in the grey nurse shark debate away from scientific fact."

There have been long-standing issues associated with the grey nurse numbers and the science used in the population estimation, and this was highlighted in Channel Nine's Sunday segment The Great Shark Hunt. Some in the scientific community are suggesting an independent workshop into the grey nurse shark to define scientific agreed facts on the east coast population of the grey nurse shark; define the level of human interaction on the grey nurse shark population with a risk assessment of human activities; and to define best management practices that is linked to the science and risk analyses.

Phil continues "Nobody wants to see the extinction of the grey nurse shark, including recreational fishers. These issues with the grey nurse need to be resolved using sound science rather than legal channels. Arnold H. Glasow remarked 'The fewer the facts, the stronger the opinion.' And, unfortunately, this seems to be applicable in the current debate on the grey nurse shark issue."

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