



Media Release

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For immediate release: **Genetics give concerns of grey nurse shark survival**

Maintaining genetic variation is important in any population as reduced genetic variation means a population may not be able to adapt to new selection processes such as climatic change or a shift in available resources. Recent studies on the genetics of the grey nurse shark shows the Australian population is isolated, and with negligible migration between east and west coasts. Also, the grey nurse shark population off the east coast has the lowest genetic variability and with suggestions of a small number of founding individuals. This is important for the east coast grey nurse population if it is as low as the 460 that DPI scientists believe, and maybe even the 3000 figure given by other groups. Any attempts to save the east coast grey nurse shark population may be doomed for genetic reasons, and these deleterious effects on the grey nurse population may well have come about in their period of rapid decline in the 1960's and 1970's.

Large numbers of divers that visit the aggregation zone at Magic Point resulted in the sharks moving on to other locations. Unpublished research from South Africa shows up to 80% of grey nurse sharks move to other locations when dive boats and divers arrive at an aggregation site. Reports have 50,000 divers visiting the aggregation site at Julian rocks each year. DPI's research notes a shortfall in the number of juveniles sited in their surveys with one possible explanation being a reproductive failure.

Referring to the Government's proposed tax on scuba divers to help fund the grey nurse shark's IVF research program, AAG President Mr Phil Ingram said "The problem is, a license to dive will assure the scuba dive industry access to the grey nurse critical habitat sites, and, in view of the limited genetic variability, we wonder if this is this really desirable? Surely, divers invading the critical habitat sites are not part of the shark's natural environment and may be equated with a significant environmental change with which the grey nurse, due to the low levels of genetic variation, are not able to adapt to ensure their survival. Could this be the cause of the reproductive failure?"

To give the grey nurse the best opportunity to survive surely the "precautionary principal" must be applied with divers out of all declared aggregation zones, but DPI (Fisheries), the NPA, NCC and the dive industry don't seem too eager. Mr Ingram asks "How serious are they at saving the grey nurse, or are there other agendas at play?"

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