



Media Release

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Media Release: 30th April 2007

For Immediate Release: **Grey nurse shark research: shuffling the deck chairs**

The "Great Shark Swindle" article by Samantha Williams in the Telegraph and the segment "The Great Shark Hunt" on Channel Nine's Sunday program tells of the possible suppression of data by DPI Fisheries scientists which suggests the grey nurse shark population along the east coast of Australia is far greater than the 500 stated by Fisheries. And many believe that it is this suppression of data by Fisheries and the discrediting of the June 2003 survey numbers that prompted the Government to move the responsibility of the grey nurse shark research from DPI Fisheries over to the Department of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

The current management plan for the protection of the grey nurse shark in NSW is largely based on the NSW Fisheries Final Report No. 63 of June 2004 entitled "Mark-recapture population estimate and movements of Grey Nurse Sharks" by Otway and Burke. It is the data which is omitted from this report, and any possible discussion of its implications to the grey nurse shark population, which discredits the current scientific facts. Some of the data omitted or not adequately discussed in the June 2004 report include:

- A major discrepancy in the resighting of tagged sharks between the 2 groups of volunteer divers in the survey of June 2003 on which the 2004 report was based.
- The disputed second survey of August 2003 in which no tags were sighted in 162 sharks seen.
- Game fisher catch records from the 1960's/70's and anecdotal report from commercial fishers of grey nurses being caught in water deeper than the 25m habitat depth stated by DPI Fisheries.
- Anecdotal reports by freedivers of many other locations in which the grey nurse shark occurs.

AAG President Phil Ingram said "One implication is it appears tagged individuals are not dispersing throughout the untagged population, all individuals do not have the same probability of initially being tagged and the second sample is not a random sample. How valid is the sampling in the June 2003 survey? This implies the population is far greater than estimated by DPI Fisheries. Just how many sharks are there and is their population increasing or decreasing?"

Phil continues: "Allegations of the altering or hiding of scientific data aside, issues associated with the science and management of the grey nurse shark justify the need of an independent scientific review or workshop to agree on the scientific facts regarding the grey nurse shark, a risk assessment on human interaction with the grey nurse shark and the best management practices linked to the science and risk assessment. Moving the grey nurse to Environment is a bit like shuffling the deck chairs hoping the ship won't sink. Serious questions remain unanswered as to the validity and bias of the current science, and they still remain no matter which Department is in charge. Unless resolved it appears the Government departments are condoning biased science."

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