

Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries

Dear Mister Ingram,

Thank you for your letter concerning protection of the grey nurse shark.

I appreciate the concerns that you have raised in relation to the placing of further fishing restrictions in critical habitat sites. The Government recognises the importance of recreational fishing as a popular social activity that provides economic benefits to the community. There are, however, serious concerns that without further protection the grey nurse shark may become extinct.

The Government has been conducting an extensive grey nurse shark tagging research tagging program to help gain a further understanding of the population size and status in NSW waters. Results from the tagging program indicate that the NSW population is estimated to be between 416 and 461 individuals.

Over the past year the tagging program has shown that 30 per cent of the tagged sharks have been hooked since they were tagged. This indicates that incidental hooking is still occurring in spite of the new regulations associated with the critical habitat sites.

The Government is reviewing protection measures for the shark in light of this recent research. I understand that the issues from your letter have been raised as part of the review process. Dr John Stevens, an internationally recognised shark specialist from the CSIRO has been appointed to provide an independent assessment of the grey nurse shark protection taking into consideration all submissions received.

Submissions are currently being reviewed and if significant changes are required, the Government will undertake further public consultation on any new proposals.

I can also advise that an independent research project has just been completed in the Julian Rock critical habitat site monitoring the behavioural impact on the grey nurse shark caused by interaction with scuba divers. The study found that scuba divers have negligible effects on the numbers and overall behaviour of grey nurse sharks at Julian Rocks. Further research within the critical habitat sites is also planned.

Thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Ian MacDonald MLC
NSW Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries