Shark Control Program Scientific Working Group

Agenda Paper 1

6 June 2024

TITLE:	***Review of Queensland Shark Management Plan 2021 - 2025***	**AGENDA ITEM NO: 3**

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Recommendation:

That working group members:

- **Note** the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has engaged KPMG Australia to deliver the review of the Queensland Shark Management Plan 2021 to 2025 (the Plan) in accordance with the Terms of Reference (Attachment 1 – confidential).
- **Provide** feedback on the evaluation framework (Attachment 2) to Tracey Scott-Holland by 17 June 2024.

Background

The Plan sets out how the Queensland Government will continue work to reduce the risk of shark bites through the traditional program, while researching and trialling new shark mitigation technologies and boosting community education on SharkSmart behaviours. Trials and research under the plan were conducted based on the recommendations in the report Queensland Shark Control Program - review of alternative approaches (the Cardno Report) and advice from the Shark Control Program Scientific Working Group.

KPMG Australia has been contracted to deliver the review of the Plan in accordance with the terms of reference (Attachment 1).

KPMG Australia is seeking feedback from the Shark Control Program Scientific Working Group on the evaluation framework for the review (Attachment 2).

Responsible officer: Michael Mikitis

Position: Manager (Shark Control Program), Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Date: 31 May 2024

Terms of Reference

Shark Control Program Review 2025

Background

The shark control program started in 1962 following several fatal shark bites across Queensland. The program has traditionally used shark nets and drumlines (baited hooks) to reduce the risk of shark bites at popular swimming beaches. The Program now operates across ten regions from Cairns to the Gold Coast and consists of 27 nets and 383 drumlines.

Tourism supports one in ten Queensland jobs and is worth more than $27 billion (pre–COVID-19) to the state's economy (Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport 2021). Queensland's tourism industry is renowned for its coastal holidays, which are identified as one of the state's key experience pillars and for which we have a competitive advantage. The program aims to provide trust in shark management measures in Queensland and supports tourists and Queenslanders to safely and confidently enjoy water-based activities and experiences.

The chief executive (Director-General of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries) is responsible for establishing and managing the program in accordance with the *Fisheries Act 1994* which states – *"Despite the main purpose of this Act, a further purpose of this Act is to reduce the possibility of shark attacks on humans in coastal waters of the State adjacent to coastal beaches used for bathing".*

Part of the program operates within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, and so the program must comply with the Australian Government permit issued by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The program's scientific working group was established in collaboration with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to provide independent scientific advice to government on the program, research and trials of alternatives that may be suitable for Queensland.

In 2019 the Queensland Government invested significant funding into the program to undertake trials and research into alternatives to traditional shark mitigation measures. The Federal Government also contributed $5 million as part of the joint commitment to trial non-lethal alternatives in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The *Queensland shark management plan 2021-2025* sets out how the Queensland Government will continue work to reduce the risk of shark bites through the traditional program, while researching and trialling new shark mitigation technologies and boosting community education on SharkSmart behaviours. Trials and research under the plan were conducted based on the recommendations in the report *Queensland Shark Control Program - review of alternative approaches* (the Cardno Report) and advice from the Shark Control Program Scientific Working Group.

The purpose of this engagement is for a consultant to build on the work undertaken in the development of the Cardno Report, review the trials, research and education initiatives undertaken by the department since 2019 and provide recommendations to the Queensland

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Government on a new look program design suitable for Queensland conditions that may be implemented beyond 2025.

Commitments

The charter letter to the Minister for Agriculture Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities, issued by the Premier of Queensland contains the following portfolio delivery commitment – "*Continue to review and adapt the Shark Control Program in line with emerging science, technology and community expectations".*

The Queensland Government has also made the following statement in outgoing correspondence – "*The Palaszczuk Government always puts the safety of people first and will not make changes until effective alternatives, suitable for Queensland conditions, are identified and proven".*

The Queensland Shark Management Plan 2021-25 sets out the plan for reviewing the Program, including results of trials and research, by 30 June 2025. "*A comprehensive review of the shark control program and outcomes of all initiatives delivered in this plan will be conducted from 2024 to 2025. This review will inform recommendations to government on future shark management options for Queensland, to be included in a new shark management plan proposed for 2025 to 2026".*

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Scope of Work

In Scope

Review of beaches covered by the program

Review of current equipment used in the program (including location, number, historic catch)

Results of trials of alternative shark bite mitigation technology conducted by the department

The latest shark research as it relates to shark bite risk

The economic return the program provides to the Queensland economy

Public sentiment towards different shark mitigation measures

Cost estimates for the recommended strategies including cost and resourcing of administration

The SharkSmart education program

Out of Scope

Shark bite mitigation alternatives not trialled by the department

Personal shark bite deterrents not independently tested

Marine Animal Release Team (MART) operations

Review of, or changes to, Queensland Legislation as it relates to the program

Expanding the program beyond the scope defined in the *Fisheries Act 1994*

Need for Consultant

The program attracts diverse and strong views from a range of stakeholders and the community. It is recommended that the Queensland Government and the department remain independent to

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the program review. Despite this independence, the government and the department will make the final decision on any changes to the program.

The consultant will evaluate the current operating arrangements of the program and consider suitable alternatives and design models with the aim of maintaining or improving the current risk profile for water users at the individual beach level.

A consultant will provide critical judgement and expert knowledge to develop recommendations to improve effectiveness of the program design.

Deliverables

The consultant will develop assessment criteria in collaboration with the department and the Scientific Working Group which will consider all variable factors that may influence the program design at the local beach level, including but not limited to, environmental variables, human activities, historic shark catch, results of trials and research (including public sentiment) undertaken by the department.

The overall objective of the review and recommendations should be to maintain or improve the risk profile to water users at the beach level, while also minimising the impact the program has on the environment, including non-target species.

The consultant will be required to provide a report on the outcomes of this assessment, including recommendations on changes to program design. Recommendations on changes to program design should be fully costed as far as reasonably possible. The consultant may provide several costed options which may include a combination of strategies to achieve the objective of the review. The report should also provide a detailed implementation plan which includes public and local government consultation as required before significant changes are made.

The Queensland Government will have discretion on the public release of this report.

Timeframe

January to June 2024 – Consultant to develop assessment methodology in collaboration with the department and the Scientific Working Group

July to October 2024 – Consultant to undertake the assessment and deliver a draft report with recommendations

October to November 2024 – Consultation with the department and the Scientific Working Group. Department to collate feedback to consultant on draft report

December 2024 – Final report delivered

January to June 2025 – Department to brief government on report and recommendations with decision made on preferred option

July 2025 onwards – release new shark management plan. Public consultation and implementation commences.

Key Contacts

Michael Mikitis – Manager, Shark Control Program

Tracey Scott-Holland – Research and Policy Coordinator, Shark Control Program

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