

Media Release

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Department of
Fisheries

Sharks, rays and skates get new protection

Concerns about the vulnerability of sharks and rays to over-exploitation have led to most of Western Australia's commercial fishing boats being prohibited from taking these fishes.

Integrated Fisheries Management spokesperson, Dr Lindsay Joll said the Department of Fisheries had written to all fishing boat licence holders to advise them the regulations about the prohibitions had been gazetted and to thank those who had already embraced the spirit of the new rules.

"Only authorised operators in the four recognised shark fisheries and a handful of other exempted fisheries will be permitted to land sharks, rays and skates," Dr Joll said.

"While most commercial fishers knew these changes were on the way, a significant number didn't wait for the legislation to come into place and have applied their own personal bans and stopped catching sharks and rays.

"There are specific concerns for whiskery, sandbar and dusky sharks (commonly called bronze whalers) and sawfish.

"Many years of research into the biology of WA's shark stocks has shown the slow growth and low reproductive potential of many species makes them highly susceptible to over-fishing.

"For example, dusky whalers take around 30 years to reach maturity and produce as few as six pups every second or third year.

"In the past sharks, rays and skates have been caught in a wide variety of fisheries that target other fish species.

By prohibiting non-authorised fishing boat licensees from taking sharks and rays, pressure can be reduced on at-risk species such as dusky and sandbar sharks and assist the recovery of a range of other species that are also likely to have been over-fished."

Dr Joll said that among the few exceptions, licensees in the South Coast Estuarine Managed Fishery could continue taking eagle rays and licensed West Coast Rock Lobster fishing boats would be allowed to take one wobbegong shark per day.

"It is important to note that all sawfish will continue to be totally protected and cannot be taken by commercial or recreational fishers," he added.

"Great white sharks are also totally protected.

"In addition, a new maximum size limit for dusky sharks will apply to those commercial fishers who are allowed to continue landing sharks.

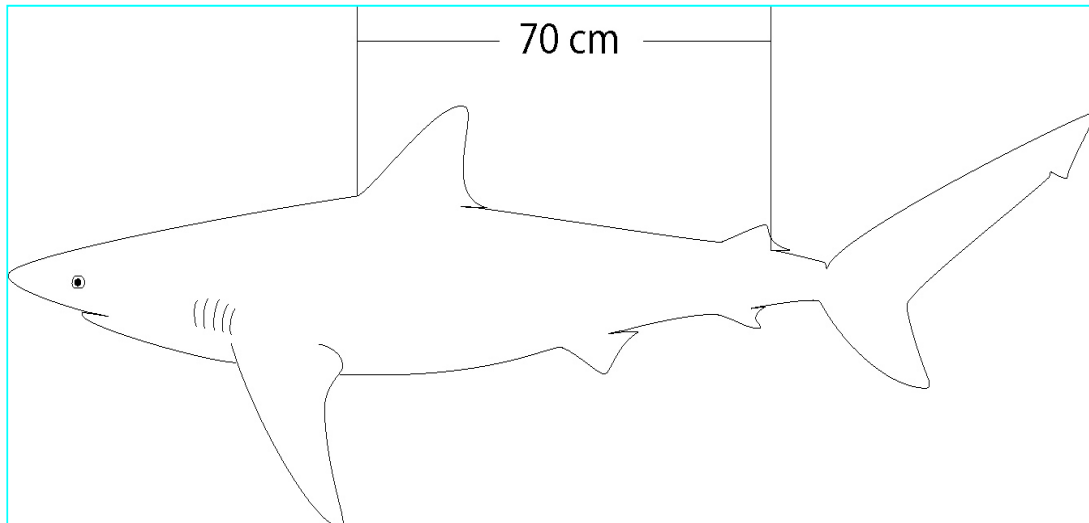
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“In the State’s four commercial shark fisheries the new regulations will ban the taking of large dusky sharks, in order to preserve the breeding stock.

“The maximum size limit will be measured as a distance of 70cm between the forward most point of the front dorsal fin and the furthest rear point of the rear dorsal fin.”



Dr Joll also noted that this maximum size limit would soon apply to recreational fishers for all whaler shark species taken south of Steep Point.

“The new recreational size limit is expected to be in place in early 2007,” he said.

“It will equate to a bronze whaler of about 1.5metres in length.”

Dr Joll said sustainable management of all of WA’s fisheries depended on all stakeholders accepting their responsibility to ensure there were fish for the future.

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