

THE SOCIAL COMPLEXITIES OF SHARK INTERACTIONS WITH QUEENSLAND FISHERIES

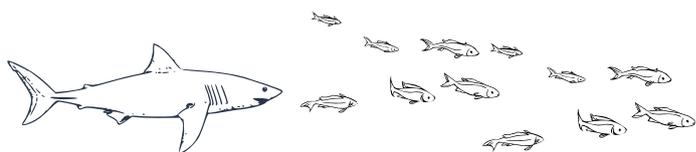
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Sharks taking fishers' catch is a frequent source of frustration and conflict in QLD fisheries, but social perspectives and fisher experiences have rarely been explored. This study interviewed 12 fishers across various sectors (commercial, recreational, charter, spearfishing, and managers) to better understand what's occurring and what drives frustrations, with the ultimate goal of informing future management.

SURFACE LEVEL FRUSTRATIONS

were driven by the time and effort wasted because of damage to or loss of gear, rather than solely economic losses.



*"If [the sharks] don't snap you off, you gotta cut your line to let them go anyway... you save all the hassle of fighting the thing for 10 minutes to find it's just a big shark there."
(Commercial fisher, 67)*

Participants expressed a notable **INCREASED FREQUENCY** in shark interactions in past 5-10 years

*"If we get a trip without a shark taking your fish, it would be a miracle."
(Commercial fisher, 67)*

WHY DO FISHERS THINK IT'S HAPPENING SO FREQUENTLY?



INCREASED SHARK NUMBERS?

Fishers from all sectors agreed that shark populations seem to have either increased or returned to levels that fishers haven't had to deal with for decades.

*"Is there more sharks? Or are they getting smarter? Probably both, because around these reefs, the sharks know when it's feeding time."
(Recreational fisher, 46)*



LEARNING LOCAL FISHING STRATEGIES?

Fishers recognised that sharks are intelligent animals that follow their boats, and have learned that the sound of an anchor drop or generator starting is effectively a "dinner bell."



DEEPER CONFLICTS

also drive fisher frustrations

FISHER DISTRUST OF MANAGEMENT

Fishers expressed dissatisfaction with historical management of the Great Barrier Reef, which partly stems from a widely held perception that management is disconnected from and doesn't understand the realities of the shark-fisher conflict.

"I think there is no management [of sharks], other than protecting them that is." (Recreational fisher, 48)

FISHER DISTRUST OF SCIENCE & MEDIA COVERAGE

Connected to the distrust of management, fishers expressed distrust that scientists work in fishers' best interests.

"Mate, I don't want to tell [scientists] there's all these bull sharks [where I'm fishing] and all of a sudden, we're not allowed to fish there because [managers] want to protect the bull sharks." (Commercial fisher, 58)

There was also a noted disconnect between what science is promoted by the media and what fishers have been experiencing on the reef, creating more distrust in science.

"It garners a sort of response from fishermen, [because they see] people published papers saying the decline of sharks, and meanwhile guys are out there getting every fish taken by a shark." (Charter fisher, 42)



PERCEIVED CLASH OF VALUES SURROUNDING CONSERVATION

There was a common perception that political and social shark conservation success on the Great Barrier Reef is partly responsible for the increase of sharks taking fishers' catch. In contrast to conserving sharks, fishers expressed a desire to maintain a balanced reef and healthy fish stocks that promotes ecosystem-wide conservation.

"I think there's gotta be a balance... If you lose two Spanish mackerel for every one you get caught, it makes no sense. If it means in that reef you've gotta brain a few sharks, maybe that's what you gotta do to get the balance back." (Recreational fisher, 46)

Several suggested that a sustainable shark fishery could help solve the perceived current imbalance.

"[Sustainable shark fisheries] is potentially a way forward, but I suspect that's going to be difficult to implement... I think once something is, let's say protected, it's very unlikely that it will become unprotected again." (Recreational fisher, 37)



These deeply-rooted frustrations create challenges that management must consider to adequately address this contentious fishery conflict.

MOVING FORWARD...

It's crucial to rebuild fisher trust in both management and science through increased collaboration and transparency. A focus on providing more locally specific information and research about sharks through the media may also prove helpful. Promoting a more holistic system view that includes both fisher conservation perspectives and shark-centered ones may help create a suitable compromise for shark management on the reef.