

Biting review finds shark policy based on movie myths

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The film *Jaws* has heavily influenced Western Australia's stance on sharks, a review of over a decade of state government policy has found.

Dr Christopher Neff of the University of Sydney has examined the narratives and shark hunt policies implemented by different WA Governments between 2000 and 2014 and found striking similarities to the 1975 Spielberg classic.

"In particular, the Western Australian Government's current 'Imminent Threat' [policy](#) to catch and kill 'rogue' sharks is predicated on Hollywood fiction," says Dr Neff, a lecturer in public policy at the University's Department of Government and International Relations.

In October this year, the West Australian [government](#) withdrew an application to the federal government to extend its drumline policy, albeit securing permission to kill sharks deemed by the government to pose 'imminent threat' to beachgoers.

"This policy is using myths as the basis for killing sharks that are protected by law and which provides no real beach safety," says Dr Neff.

"This fiction serves an important political purpose because films allow politicians to rely on familiar narratives following shark bites to blame individual sharks in order to make the events governable and to trump evidence-based science."

"The message from this research is that politicians do not have a right to their own set of scientific facts about sharks, no matter how popular the movie."

Dr Neff's research, which has been published online in the *Australian Journal of Political Science*, spells out the Jaws Effect as a political device based on three themes from the film: the intentionality of [sharks](#), the perception that all human-shark incidences are fatal and the idea that killing the shark is the only solution.

"Unpacking the politics of [shark bites](#), or any public policy issue, involves addressing the way words and images are used to paint a picture for the public and inform policy choices. This research therefore offers broader implications for policy analysis," says Dr Neff.

"[It] identifies a worrying style of policymaking where widely known fiction can be used to navigate the attribution of blame and to prescribe policy responses," he says.

More information: *Australian Journal of Political Science*, [www.tandfonline.com/eprint/D4a ... JxakZiJiFriiz2T/full](http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/D4a...JxakZiJiFriiz2T/full)

Provided by University of Sydney

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