

Research questions whether shark control programs work

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New research from Deakin University has questioned the assumption that shark control programs designed to reduce the numbers of shark attacks on NSW and southern African beaches actually work.

Associate Professor Laurie Laurenson led a team of marine science researchers who analysed 60 years of [shark attack](#), shark population and human population data in South Africa and Australia, and found no relationship between [population levels](#) in netted areas and the number of [attacks](#).

The research has been submitted for publication to a leading journal.

Associate Professor Laurenson, from Deakin University's Centre for Integrative *Ecology* within the School of Life and Environmental Sciences, said the researchers chose to speak publicly ahead of publication after he was approached by ABC's Four Corners while researching tonight's story probing the evidence of whether shark culling programs worked.

"Our research is the first of its kind, in that it statistically tests the hypothesis that there is a relationship between the [population](#) size of [sharks](#) and the number of attacks," Associate Professor Laurenson said.

"We honestly expected that we would find that as the numbers of sharks declined there would be a reduction in the number of shark attacks. We simply could not demonstrate a statistically significant relationship."

Associate Professor Laurenson acknowledged his findings would be controversial as they are counter-intuitive.

"It makes sense, fewer sharks means fewer attacks. It really should be this way, but we can't prove it to be true," he said.

Associate Professor Laurenson said that popular belief simply hadn't been tested until now.

"If better data becomes available and a similarly robust analysis can draw difference conclusions, then that is the nature of science and we are comfortable with that outcome. But until we are proved incorrect, we stand by the analysis," he said.

Provided by Deakin University

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