

Shark Attack in Queensland: Fearing Monsters in the Whitsundays

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Asia-Pacific Research, November 07, 2018

Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [Environment](#)

It begins with a gruesome account: a tourist, paddleboarding and swimming in an idyllic setting baked by sun – in this case, Cid Harbour in the Whitsundays, Queensland – attacked by a shark. He suffers a massive loss of blood; he goes into cardiac arrest. The accounts that follow are just as predictable as the consequences of the shark's work: a hunt for the animal, a debate about how best to curb future attacks, and an attempt to minimise adverse publicity for the tourist industry.

The death of medical researcher **Daniel Christidis** sent jitters through dive boat operators in the region. Local dive boat operator **Tony Fontes** [remained](#) philosophical.

“People are willing to take the risk of swimming in waters that are potential risk of a jellyfish, using precautions like stinger suits, and I’m sure that tourists will do the same with sharks.”

Marine biologists such as **Blake Chapman** have also made it into the news with cautionary notes, but there is a feeling that calm heads are about to be lost.

“We really need to be smarter than what we have been and actually learn from these things as opposed to just going out and killing animals.”

The increased number of attacks could, surmised Chapman, be the result of a range of factors: the movement of shark food sources in the area, increased rainfall or changes in water temperature. [According](#) to Inspector **Steve O’Connell**, the Whitsunday area was not famed for its vicious shark attacks, featuring the odd “minor” nip and bite without more.

So far, Queensland **Tourism Minister Kate Jones** has resisted caving into demands that permanent drum lines be placed at Cid Harbour, while **Fisheries Minister Mark Furner** [issued](#) an unequivocal warning:

“We can’t be clearer – don’t swim in Cid Harbour.”

The shark mauling was Cid Harbour’s third in the last few months (Two took place in September, one on a 12-year-old, **Hannah Papps**, whose leg required amputation; another, Tasmanian tourist **Justine Barwick**, who has returned to her home state to convalesce.)



Source: Brisbane Times

With each attack, calls for further action in what resembles a guerrilla campaign are made. The human tribe, going on ritualistic rampage, demands retribution. The September attacks precipitated an all too familiar reaction: a needless, bloody cull that did little to either address the issue of swimmer safety nor the behaviour of the animals in question.

In 2014, when surfer **Sean Pollard** lost an arm and his other hand near Esperance, the West Australian Barnett government took little time to implement what it [termed](#) an “imminent threat” policy. A shark spotted near a popular beach was essentially fair game, to be pre-emptively slaughtered irrespective of how many people might be swimming or present in the area at the time. To make matters that much murkier, Pollard himself expressed [doubt](#) as to which animal was necessarily responsible for his injuries. Two bronze whalers came to mind.

Such policies, as **Christopher Pepin-Neff** [observes](#) in *The Conversation*, are based on the slippery foundations of myth:

“individual large sharks pose a threat because they are territorial. A shark that bites someone is likely to do it again, and even if there is not an incident now, it is better to kill the shark because it may return.”

These are the fictional “rogue” sharks, “problem” animals which supply the stuff of fantasy for confused policy makers more disposed to vengeance than accommodation.

Not being of the cuddly sort, sharks lie in the disturbed archive of the human unconscious, a monster that all too readily becomes a target and focus when an attack is reported.

“Myths and monsters,” **Marina Warner** [reminds us](#), “have been interspliced since the earliest extant poetry from Sumer: the one often features the other.”

We are not only fearful, but wish to be entertained by fear. When the more innovative instincts of the human species kicks in, the monster can serve various useful purposes, be it

as weaponry or medicine with fictive, healing properties.

In August, the opening of [The Meg](#), an adaption of the first of Steve Alten's six-book horror sci-fi series, again featured that old monster versus man motif, with the naval captain, Jonas Taylor doing battle with this intimidating resident of the sea, the megalodon. (To give the trope added ballast, Taylor is played by veteran action hero, Jason Statham, "the most fearsome type of human being to have ever lived" [muse](#) Luke Holland and Stuart Heritage in *The Guardian*.) Reduced to celluloid and animation, a remarkable animal becomes the marine nightmare dangerous and nigh impossible to tame, terrifying humans young and old. The obvious point – that humans don't tend to feature high on a shark's menu list – is assiduously avoided.

As **Vivienne Westbrook** of the Oceans Institute based at the University of Western Australia [cautions](#),

"fictionalised versions, with their threatening fins, chomping jaws and general grudge against humanity, have tended to blind us to what is truly amazing about sharks in our oceans."

But being blind is actually what the human species is rather good at, relapsing into fits of retribution that serve no purpose other than to satisfy a brief communal lust for revenge. The monster, even one whose predecessors have been on this planet for 450 million years, will be hunted and killed – by the [tens of millions](#), if need be.

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