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19 January 2006

Mr Richard Bryce and Mr John Morcombe
The Manly Daily
26 Sydney Road
MANLY 2095

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By email only to:

Dear Sirs,

RE: Shark nets not a life saver

I refer to the articles in *The Manly Daily*, Saturday 14 January 2006, "Net result is safer beaches, say lifesavers" and "Raising the shark alarm".

Ross Tester's statement that there have been no fatal shark attacks on Sydney's beaches since nets were introduced in 1937 is absolutely correct. However, it is not just because of netting. In the years before shark nets, there were huge numbers of sharks in NSW waters because of the whaling station at Twofold Bay and the discharge of offal from Homebush abattoir through the sewage ocean outfall at Malabar. The removal of those food sources and over-fishing have since led to a severe decline in shark numbers in NSW coastal waters. Shark numbers are very unlikely to ever reach the levels they were at in the 1930s and 40s when beach netting began. In fact, some sharks are now endangered species, including the Great white and the Grey Nurse.

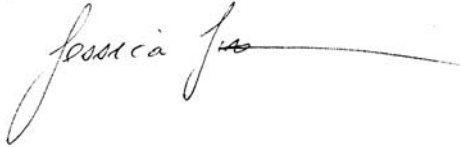
Ross Tester says, "The whole point of shark netting is about safety". That's not true. The biggest problem with beach nets is that they are not selective in what they catch. For each dangerous shark caught, hundreds, if not thousands of harmless sharks and other marine species, including turtles, whales, dolphins, dugongs, rays and fin fish are caught and killed in the nets. In the last two years two baby humpback whales, which are also endangered, have been caught and killed in the nets. Now that Great white sharks are endangered and protected, any live Great whites caught in the nets must be released, leaving only two target species – the Tiger shark and Bull shark. All other species are wasted by-catch. The environmental cost of beach nets is so significant that the NSW Fisheries Scientific Committee has listed the use of beach nets as a Key Threatening Process under the *Fisheries Management Act*.

While some people may rightly dub the nets "walls of death", this is mis-leading. The nets do not provide a physical barrier between the ocean and the beach, they don't extend from the water surface to the bottom, they do not cover the whole of the beach, and the nets are only set for about 50% of the time between September to April. Indeed, the Fisheries Scientific Committee has found that 40% of shark captures occur on the beach side of the nets because sharks are able to swim over and around the nets. Given this fact, it is questionable whether the nets do in fact make the beach a safer place to swim given that a dangerous shark could easily swim over or under the nets and when the nets are not in place, the sharks will still be there. The last fatal shark attack in Sydney was in 1963, in Sydney Harbour!



Considering the many tens of thousands of people who swim at Sydney's beaches, the actual risk of shark attack is infinitesimally small. The large amount of money spent on netting each year would be much better devoted to any number of worthwhile causes, possibly including the Surf Life-saving Association.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Jessica Simpson', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jessica Simpson
Solicitor
Environmental Defender's Office Ltd

