



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OFFICER



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NSW SHARK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY



Department of
Primary Industries



PURPOSE OF YOUR ROLE

I lead the Community Engagement Team for the NSW Shark Management Strategy. The aim of this Strategy is to find ways to help protect people from shark interactions whilst minimising harm to sharks and other wildlife.

The purpose of my role is to lead a team that works to connect with beach communities. We help explain trials of different technologies like drones and SMART drumlines and listen to community views. We also work to share the latest shark science from our amazing researchers and educate people about how to be 'SharkSmart' whilst they are at the beach.

How does that help build stronger primary industries?

To build stronger primary industries, we need to work as close as we can with communities, industries and people, which is what my job is all about. The Shark Management Strategy also helps keep people safe, whilst protecting our aquatic resources and environment.

TRAINING / EDUCATION

I studied a Bachelor of Communications and then went on and completed a Masters of Environmental Science. I think having both science and communications training has been a great base for this work.

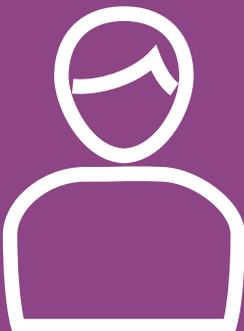
PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES THAT ARE USEFUL IN THIS ROLE?

- To work in community engagement, you really need to be a very good listener, particularly when it comes to a topic like sharks, because people can have such different views and perspectives.
- You need to be an excellent communicator, who is creative and able to translate complex science into meaningful information.
- I also think it helps to be authentic and have a sense of humour! You are working with so many different people and being authentic is the key to establishing meaningful relationships.



A TYPICAL DAY IN YOUR ROLE

A typical day for me at the moment could be anything from working with our scientists and media team to learn about research findings and design how to best communicate this science, to planning stakeholder meetings, Council forums and education events. After five years of trialling all of these amazing new technologies and researching sharks we have a lot of information and, my role is now focused on sharing all of the results with our beach authorities and Councils. All of this new information will help governments and communities make decisions.

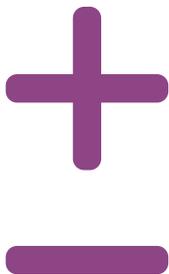


Quote

"There is always a way for you to work your way into the career you want and if you are passionate about what you do it makes it very easy to come to work."

WHAT IMPACT DO YOU SEE TECHNOLOGY HAVING IN THIS FIELD IN THE NEXT 20 YEARS?

I think technology can bring so many exciting things into this field but what is unique about community engagement is that human connection is the key. I don't think technology can ever replace having a conversation on a beach with someone face to face, or how it feels to tell each other stories in person. I do get really excited to think what could be possible in 20 years – who knows, we could bring virtual sharks into classrooms!



I love the look on people's faces when they learn about DPI's shark tagging results and see just how far these creatures travel! Sometimes 100 – 150km's a day! I think that's my favourite part of my job is connecting with people and sharing the science and seeing their awe and amazement.

I think we could do without sensationalised stories about sharks. The social research work that DPI has done shows that people want science to lead the conversation rather than fear. When we think about how many people are in the ocean every day, the chance of being bitten by a shark is low. In saying that, when it happens, it is of course, so traumatic for all of the people involved and we should never downplay that trauma.

DOES CREATIVITY PLAY A PART IN THIS ROLE?

Absolutely! Creativity and community engagement go hand in hand. Our team used creative thinking to design a mobile shark education trailer to travel around the NSW, to create videos, interactive activities and events. One of my favourite moments of creativity, was using a sand sculpture artist to make a huge hammerhead shark out of sand for a schools event and all the kids got to learn how to make sharks out of sand. I get to be really creative in my job, which is one of the reasons I love it so much.



BACKGROUND

Where did you study?

I grew up on the Gold Coast and studied at Griffith University for both my Bachelors degree and Masters. I'm a big fan of lifelong learning, so most recently, I have been studying with an amazing organisation called the Centre for Conservation Peacebuilding based in the USA.

What other roles have you had?

I've had lots of different roles. When I finished Uni, I worked for SeaWorld as a Marine Education Officer and in animal care. This was a great place to learn about sharks and work with a team that's passionate about people and education. I've also worked for organisations like Keep Australia Beautiful and Landcare in Environmental Education roles and for the QLD Government in programs to eradicate invasive pests like Fire Ants and Emergency Animal Diseases like Hendra Virus.

What advice do you have for young people who are interested in this kind of work?

Go for it! Working with communities to help solve challenges and share cutting edge science is always exciting and so rewarding. Don't be dissuaded by people telling you there are no jobs, there is always a way for you to work your way into the career you want. If you are passionate about what you do, it makes it very easy to come to work.



Can you tell us about a recent highlight?

I was very lucky to go on a Winston Churchill Fellowship in 2019. These Fellowships are designed to help Australians travel overseas to explore a topic they are passionate about. This was the best adventure of my life to date! My project was about improving how we can coexist with sharks. I travelled all over the world to learn from other communities who are trying to coexist with wildlife. I went to Washington to learn more about Wolves and People, Alaska to learn about Bears and People and Namibia to learn about Cheetahs and People. I also looked at Sharks in Cape Town and Cape Cod and how people are coexisting with these predators. In all of these cases, conflict occurs when animals harm people because people have different beliefs about 'what the right thing is to do' in these terrible situations and humans are complex. What I learned is that in order to improve coexistence between people and sharks, we need to make sure we listen to each other's views and have more tolerance for each other's perspectives. We can't solve these challenges without listening to one another and respecting each other and of course, respecting the role that sharks play in our oceans. I also learned about how these challenges are best solved when we all work together.

