**Are sharks our friends or foes?**

**THE CONSERVATIONIST**ALEXIA WELLBELOVE

**Alexia Wellbelove is the senior program manager with Humane Society International.**

IN THE late 1990s, Humane Society International submitted a nomination to list the great white shark under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

This was following concerns that the combined pressures of recreational and commercial fishing, and the international trade in great white shark parts (particularly their jaws and teeth), were driving a reduction in their numbers in Australia, as part of a global population decline. In 1999, after detailed scientific investigation of the species' status, the great white shark was given full protection.

There are lots unknown about the great white shark. What we do know from historical evidence is that there has been a bigger decline Australia-wide of these sharks over the past 60 years compared with other sharks in the region, and no evidence to suggest their numbers have recovered substantially since receiving protection in 1999.

Sharks are a vital part of our ocean environment. They act as apex or top predators, maintaining the balance of all life beneath them. Healthy numbers of sharks are an indicator of the health of our marine system, with research demonstrating that the massive depletion of sharks that has occurred in the marine environment worldwide has had negative and cascading effects throughout the ocean ecosystems. This has the potential to weaken our fishing industries and the livelihoods of many who depend on the ocean.

Australia has an immense moral and legal responsibility to protect great white sharks in our waters.



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**THE HUNTER** VIC HISLOP

**Vic Hislop is a former shark hunter.**

THERE are a lot of animals and other things that need our protection in this world but the great white shark has never been one of them.

In truth, sharks in Australian waters were never really protected for conservation purposes.

They have been protected wholly and solely for one thing - the new attraction of cage diving. And this cage diving is putting us all at risk.

Sharks, right from when they are little, come across blood scents, whether it be from whales, packs of dolphins or turtles being killed and ripped apart by other sharks. They follow this scent along the current to the source. As they get closer, their senses get more and more aroused and then they attack whatever is on the end of that line of scent. So as sharks follow the burley trail left by cage dive operators, the same thing happens - they get more and more excited. And at the end of this trail what does the shark see? Humans in cages. The shark then immediately associates humans with food and burley.

Ending the protection of shark species would be the best thing to happen to the ecosystem. These animals also eat thousands of large fish in their lifetime, like dolphins, whales and dugongs.



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**THE VICTIM**GLEN ORGIAS

**Glenn Orgias has written a book, *Man in a Grey Suit*(Penguin), about his experience.**

IT'S DIFFICULT to write about the protection of sharks right now. Five people have been killed in 10 months in Western Australia. My heart goes out to the families of the victims. It is an emotional issue. I can understand the call for a shark cull, but I just can't support that proposition.

Sharks are an important part of the ocean's ecosystem. We aren't. We are not meant to be, anyway. In 1998, the government recognised a decline in great white shark numbers - a reported drop of 60 per cent to 95 per cent in 50 years. This drop was primarily the result of human activity.

What we need is a scientific assessment of shark populations. Money needs to be spent on research: tagging projects, studies of migration patterns, investigations of the environmental conditions associated with shark attacks. That is all missing. With better - or any - information we may be able to lower the risk of attack.

I lost my hand to a great white, part of my arm too. After the attack I swam around for a while in terror, with it somewhere below. I almost lost everything to that shark, but it didn't come back for me. It had made a mistake; thought I was a fish, maybe. Fair enough, it is its ocean, not mine. It was just doing what nature built it to do.

I'm happy to be back in the ocean, surfing again. I know I'm just a visitor out there. I don't know for sure, but I don't feel like I'll see that shark again. It was four years old then, it'd be seven now. It might live for another 25 years; I really hope it does.

