

**ACTIVITY:** Longline fishing from a kayak  
**CASE:** [GSAF 2005.01.08](#)  
**DATE:** Saturday January 8, 2005  
**LOCATION:** Taupiri Bay, Northland, New Zealand.

**NAME:** Paul Morris  
**DESCRIPTION:** He is a 39-year-old male, 6'4" and weighs 90 kilograms. He was clad in a summer wetsuit (half suit). He is a tradesman from Auckland.  
**KAYAK:** 4.150 metres in length

#### **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** Sunny with intermittent cloud cover. The air temperature was about 25°C.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea was calm and cold; the water temperature was about 14°C.

**ENVIRONMENT:** The incident took place over a sandy bottom and there was kelp in the area. There were four live snapper alive in kayak, and the kayaker noticed that the snapper stopped biting and "all went very calm" immediately before the incident. He was not aware of any prior shark incidents in the area.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 800 metres

**DEPTH OF WATER:** 25 to 30 metres, but the incident took place on the surface.

**TIME:** Midday (12h00)

**NARRATIVE:** It was supposed to be the start of a well-earned holiday with friends, starting off with a stay on a farm near Taupiri Bay Northland followed by a week at Tauranga Bay, their usual holiday destination.

Morris relates what happened:

"After setting up camp I took my children on a 'look and see' trip to locate a potential place to land base fish as well as be near foul ground on rocky outcrops to lay my long line, preferably with drop offs to deeper water: 60-feet and plus.

"As we drove from Taupiri to Elliot's bay we stopped and viewed from the top of the hill and it looked perfect to set out from Taupiri bay; it had extensive reef systems running down the coast line and a fairly large reef centered in the bay with what looked like a drop-off into deep water. Having spoken to a local who told me that this place was pretty scarce of fish, I decided that this was going to be the first place to try as it, visually, looked to be one of the better areas to have fish holding qualities. With the decision made, it was back to camp to setup the rods and organize the kayak and longline.



“On the next day, being Saturday the 8th of January, we headed down to the bay with our friends and family.

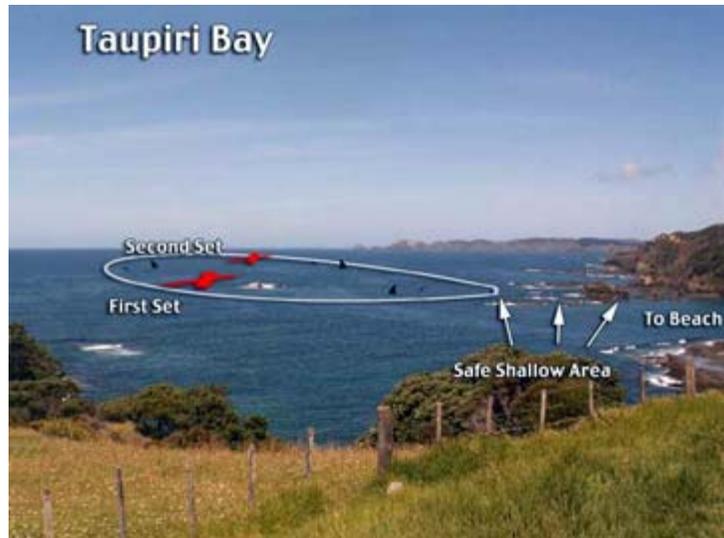
“With an incoming tide and slightly overcast, when I was fully prepared with pilchards, squid, some tuna and kina burley, I anxiously headed out as I hadn't fished for a long time. Looking back to see the children, I saw them playing happily on the beach.

“As I approached the outer side of the reef that was about 300 metres out of Taupiri bay, I drifted for a while to check the direction of the current and slight breeze. I started to lay my target hook long line approximately 50 metres off the center of the reef on the ocean side. Counting the notches in my main line as I was setting, I could estimate the water depth at approximately 68 feet in a fairly slow current. I ended up only laying 15 hooks for a ‘look and see’ approach. My line had no sooner hit the bottom with my last weight before I was starting to feel the tugging of snapper feasting on the pilchard offerings.

“But as I expected, due to the very cold water temperature, I only had two keepers and a few lip-hooked undersized snappers that were safely released in good order.

Just as I was about to reset, the wind picked up considerably and started to push me to around 400 metres southeast of the spot I was originally in with a depth of 70 to 80 feet. I decided to carry on and set the whole 25 hooks. Once the last weight had hit the bottom, and with the slow tossing of burly into the water, I was feeling confident of a better catch as the main line had a couple of good hits. Then as quick as they came on the bite, they stopped with the wind easing back off to being very calm water. I kept dishing out the burly by hand, unconcerned about the amount of burly on the sides of the kayak and in the sitting area of my sit-on-top kayak.

“Upon the start of retrieving my line, the first thing I noticed was I still had baits on — unlike the previous set. Then I spotted that awesome sight of a decent-sized snapper shimmering in the water below me. Just as I saw the snapper, a dark shadow passed ever



so slowly through the water, taking my mainline on right angles to my lay line. At that time I put it down to being a large long clump of ocean seaweed drifting in the current, totally unaware that this was to be the start of the most terrifying ordeal I was to encounter in all my years of fishing.

Paul Morris had now been on the water for an hour and 45 minutes.

“My first realization that all was not what it appeared to be was when my main line moved back into its original position and I noticed that my nice-sized snapper was all but gone, only leaving a proportion of its head still attached to the hook. In the corner of my eye I saw the large dark object that I initially thought was seaweed, slowly coming into full view. It was simultaneously sending me into a state of awe and total disbelief at the sheer size and beauty of this magnificent creature. At this point in time I was amazed, yet terrified at the same time. I could not take my eyes off it. I was stunned, trying to take in as much detail as I could to later identify this magnificent creature. I knew it was a shark and possibly a Great white.

“The shark very slowly and gracefully swam past slightly side on to me no more than five metres away and started a series of ‘S’ turns. As it continued this motion I could not help but realize that the size was at least six to seven feet longer than my kayak — when I saw its head equal with the stern of my kayak and its back half was still in a slight curved angle forward off the bow. Its colour appeared jet black tapering to an off-grey and a brilliant white at the base of its head and gills with a meaty cut line across its tail.

“I had a feeling that is almost indescribable, as pure fear was starting to take hold of me, wondering for that brief minute or two whether I was going to be nailed or live another day to enjoy the sight, sound and laughter of my beautiful wife and children. I was telling myself that this was it; never again would I venture in unfamiliar areas alone. With all this going on at the same time, a wave of relief came over me as the shark veered off back toward the direction of the reef I had earlier fished from.

“The shark had no sooner got more than 25 to 30 metres away when to my shock and horror it turned and fairly quickly came towards me raising its dorsal fin approximately 300 to 400mm above the surface causing a wake to appear from its thrust and seeing its tail fin partially above the water line in a bent over position. I think it was about this time I was feeling that I was dead for sure.

“Trying to stay calm as possible I decided to stay perfectly still, as I was sure if I was to paddle I would create more disturbance in the water like a fish in distress. I quickly cut my mainline free as well as my left knee in the process dropped my knife then momentarily closed my eyes as it approached. Upon opening my eyes I saw the true size of its body mass as the shark passed under my kayak at a slower rate and deeper in the water than what it was on in its initial approach feeling its dorsal fin touch and rock me to one side and having to counter balance by putting my left leg onto the right side to stay upright which caused me to have my feet partially in the water. I was in total shock and awe at the distance across its head as it was at least a metre between the eyes.

“After the shark had made its pass under me it started a short fast turn. Then it was at this

time I saw the amazing white line running under its body. Then it came back nudging the bow of the kayak and it was about this time I released my bowels and bladder. I started to very slowly heading for the nearest rocky outcrop that was about 400 metres away trying to cause as little disturbance in the water as possible as I was paddling. I grabbed my bait and burley, put it into a bag and threw it as far as I could with a sinker in it to try to distract the shark, but with very little effort it turned to one side and it was there. The shark continued with its oval circling of me, nudging the kayak as I was vomiting all over myself. I tried to make slow progress to shore and I was constantly trying to watch where it was. I lost sight of it as it came and bumped me on the bow and stern repeatedly. The oval circling started off wide and gradually started getting closer and tighter in this circling manner. During this period it seemed as time had stopped. I had found it to be mind-blowing with the amount of things that started going through my head, when I was sure that I was going to die. I was crying my eyes out and swearing at it to stop and leave me alone to no avail.

“The shark would have bumped me at least 12 times over a 20- to 30-minute period. As I was nearing shallower water it felt as if the shark had pushed the stern of the kayak under the water, still being at least 100 metres from the rocky outcrop protruding out of the water. With all my heart and strength I just paddled as hard as I could, pouring on the power to reach shore. I was begging God to give me the strength as I had the will to try and make it. That was the last time it nudged me, and while I watched the shark over my right shoulder, it only then started to swim back to the outer reef. The emotions I had on my very slow paddle back through the shallows to the beach was extreme fear and relief at the same time. For me it is a feeling that I cannot put into words even now as I'm reliving the experience to share with others.

“Upon my arrival back at the beach I was later told that I was white as a ghost and uncontrollably shaking, vomiting and crying just repeating how big it was. After a short period of time I saw some young children paddling out with no life jackets on and told their parents what I had seen as I was fearing the worst. As well as telling other people what I had seen. One of them was a tuna fisherman and he then said people should be notified and made a sign up to advise people of what I saw.

“That night when we returned to the camp I slept with my son in the tent and my wife and younger children went in the barn for the night as I did not want them to get upset. During the night I had very cold sweats and woke up to my son shaking me but at the time I did not know why he was waking me till the morning when he told me how I had stopped breathing for up to a minute and a half at a time.

“That morning being Sunday the 9th of January, I tried to hide my feelings about my experience and took my family to Russell for breakfast. On our return past the top of Taupiri bay there were a lot of people looking over the bay, so we stopped to have a look. I could not believe my eyes, we could see a very large black shadow circling around the back of the reef that I had fished off the day before. We then drove past the bay itself and spoke to the Tuna fisherman again. He told me that he had seen a large patch and he thought it was just a pack of trevally from a great distance. He also told me how he would not let his wife go swimming that morning because of the possibility of there being a shark in the area.

“On our arrival back at the farm I told our friends and phoned the police to advise them of what we had witnessed. The police asked us to call them back if it was still there. We all went back to the top of the hill and watched this huge shark circling the outer reef. I re-notified the police that the shark that was still circling the reef. For the next six hours or so we watched it from the hill top, as did a lot of other people. One tourist filmed the shark for a good 15 minutes. During this time I felt very shaky but happy to be on high ground watching this amazing sight.

“The shark continued swimming in what looked like long oval circles at the back of the reef the whole day and on occasions swam right around the reef then went back to its continuous circling motions on the back side of the reef. Some people went out to the reef from the shore side. Then one guy started snorkeling for a few seconds then climbed onto the reef and stayed there until the boat came right up to the rocks so he could re-board without entering the water. They slowed as they went past the shark and booted it back to another bay.

“At approximately 19h00 [7 pm] the shark did one long half circle of the reef and headed down into deeper water about 30 minutes before the police turned up. At the time we were about to leave, the shark was again briefly spotted by another observer and my son for a few seconds before it once again swam down into the depths.

“**The Media** - I was approached by TV 3 news and agreed to be interviewed to create public awareness about shark I came across. I had a 30-minute phone conversation with one of the reporters and was told they were trying to track me down over the last couple of days. Then I was told that a camera-man was on the way to catch up. The person giving me the phone interview said, “That’s gripping stuff and we want you to say on camera what you saw and how you felt, then in the next sentence reassure people “so we don’t have a panic situation”. On arrival of the camera lady, Cammy, I was not told about the two clowns they previously interviewed. They recorded all of three minutes as well as having the phone conversation on record only to take out parts of what I said to them, followed by a couple of sarcastic idiotic imbeciles taking the piss about going out and catching a fish and how it was seven to eight metres long when they returned to the beach. Then to top it off, TV 3 mentioned — in a very unprofessional mocking manner — how I had another shark incident a year prior.

“Well done TV 3. As far as I, and a lot of other people, think you really are on top the shit list for so-called professional reporting of the facts and are more concerned for your headlines than anything else. I would like to stress to people, please think very carefully before talking to the media especially TV 3 the so-called news reporters.

“**Why Did the Shark Attack the Kayak?** - Struggling hooked fish is probably the most powerful shark attractant available. Sharks can pick up vibrations from struggling fish from kilometres away, and this is probably what brought the shark to the boat in the first place. When the shark arrived it took some fish from the longline which likely put it into a feeding mode. The added smell of blood in the water from the fish it had mauled would have probably kept it interested in the area. Blood from the bait and burley thrown overboard, and any that was being washed off the deck of the kayak, plus the vomit and bleeding

from the badly cut knee would have all added to the sharks curiosity in the kayak.

**“Confirmation of Shark Species** - After returning early from holiday and talking to Mr. Paul Barnes of Paul’s Fishing Kites, describing everything about what I saw in order to identify the species of shark I encountered, it came down to possibly being a Great white. I needed to know for sure and wanted answers to why it acted the way it did.

“With all this in mind, I contacted Andrew Christy of Kelly Tarlton’s Underwater World and described everything I could recall down to the smallest details, including the cut-mark of pink flesh across its tail. Andrew told me he was sure the shark was a Great white and gave me a lot of very helpful information as to why it acted the way it did. Great white sharks have very good eyesight and it would have been checking me out when it was doing its S-turns, also using its electromagnetic pulse sensors that are located around the mouth as well as down the lateral lines of the shark’s body to detect a pulse to ascertain whether I was alive or slowly dying, looking upon me as a potential meal.

“During the next 20 to 30 minutes of the oval circling slowly getting tighter, nudging, then finally striking — not from the stern but from beneath — with its mouth area to confirm if I was food or otherwise. Usually when sharks circle in this manor – oval, getting closer -- they disorient their prey by seeming to be far away and hard to keep track of prior to going for the kill. When I asked the Andrew why did it just not eat me, he explained it may have been undecided whether I was food or a possible threat to it. The shark may have been in calf or was just curious as to what I was.

“My next question was, “Did I do the right thing by initially staying still in the water on the shark’s first approach side-on to me, then slowly paddling towards the shore trying to cause as little disturbance as possible”. Andrew said, “What you did must have been the right choice on that day as you are still alive and it all depends on the fish on that day -- so one cannot really say what one should or should not do as there is still so much to learn about them.

“A BIG thank you to Andrew Christy and Paul Barnes for their helpful knowledge and willingness in helping me come to terms with my experience.

**“How to minimize risk** - If you are setting a longline from a kayak, I would suggest baiting the line on shore, or at least have the bait cut up and in a waterproof container on the kayak, so that line setting times and bloody mess are minimized.

“When hauling the line, do it as quickly as possible and ike or kill the fish as soon as they are landed, as the vibrations of a dying fish on deck will be amplified by the hull. Keep all fish and bait as well as any burley in leak proof containers. Doing this will make any blood and offal less likely to leak or wash over the side and possibly set up a burley trail leading straight to the kayak.

**“How this has affected me** - I have gone from being a confident kayaker to sleepless nights, nightmares, chronic stuttering, and unable to concentrate for periods of time, turning my whole world upside-down to the point of needing counseling and medication to get through to being back to normal. But I do NOT blame this on the shark. As a good

friend told me, I was the one that rang the dinner bell by having distressed fish on my longline, burly in the water and made myself appear to be part of the potential meal. As well as having a new-found respect for the creatures of the sea and an overwhelming desire to learn as much as I can about these magnificent fish as they have been around for more than 350 million years.

“Finally, I hope that my experience will make others more aware that we are in their world and we as a people need to minimize the risks to ourselves by taking precautions to not becoming a potential meal as well as having a much greater respect for all creatures of the sea.”

**INJURY:** Morris was not physically injured by the shark.

**TREATMENT:** Morris was taken to North Shore Mental Health Services Crisis Team 2 on Taharoto Road. The attending physicians were Mike and Ron.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** A female white shark, >four metres in length.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Ralph Collier