

**ACTIVITY:** Surf-skiing

**CASE:** **GSFAF 2007.10.15**

**DATE:** Monday October 15, 2007

**LOCATION:** The Pass, one of the most popular surf breaks near Byron Bay, New South Wales, Australia.

**NAME:** Linda Whitehurst

**DESCRIPTION:** She is a 52-year-old female, an experienced paddler from Coopers Shoot, six km south of Byron.

#### **BACKGROUND**

**MOON PHASE:** New Moon, October 11, 2007; First Quarter, October 19, 2007

**ENVIRONMENT:** Lifeguards said this was the second incident involving a white shark in less than a week. "There was a similar incident last Tuesday when a man in a kayak was menaced by a white shark, about eight to 10 foot long, at Wategos Beach, just the next beach around from where this woman was attacked today," said lifeguard Stephen Leahy.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 150 metres (450 feet)

**TIME:** 11h30 (AEST)

**NARRATIVE:** Mrs Whitehurst and her husband Glen were paddling from shore when the shark tipped her from her ski. "The shark circled the kayak (surf ski) and then swam directly at her," said police inspector Owen King.

She said she feared the shark would take hold of her leg before she was able to fight it off. "My ankle's gone, he's going to grab a leg ... that's what I thought," Mrs. Whitehurst said.

Her husband Glen described seeing the shark rise up and bite the back of his wife's surf ski. "(It) literally lifted itself in the back of Linda's boat ... and had the back of the boat in its mouth and gave it a shake," he said.

Mrs Whitehurst said once she was in the water, she repeatedly struck the shark with her paddle until it let go. "I just kept punching, punching, punching," she said, demonstrating how she thrust the paddle at the shark. She struck the shark's mouth with the paddle from the kayak. The shark then took off and swam away from her."

When the shark retreated, Mrs Whitehurst was able to make her way to shore before going to hospital.



Photo: Brenden Allen

*Linda Whitehurst shows where she was nipped by the shark.*

The beach was closed after the incident and 30 minutes later Surf Life Saving boat crews spotted the shark and chased it out to sea. The beach was reopened about 14h00 [2 pm] (AEST) on Monday, northern NSW lifeguard coordinator Stephen Leahy said.

**INJURY:** She sustained a small laceration on her wrist.

**TREATMENT:** She required four stitches in the small wound the shark left on her wrist. "She received a few stitches in her arm, but there was no other damage, fortunately," a Byron Bay Hospital spokesman said.

**SPECIES:** The incident involved a white shark about 2.5 metres in length

**COMMENT:** News of the incident spread quickly around the Byron Bay area, with popular learn-to-surf classes cancelled and hundreds of beachgoers staying out of the surf despite the perfect spring conditions.

Authorities said it was unusual to find sharks so close to shore at Byron Bay, but Mr Leahy said, "It appears to be unusual that a shark would menace people like this. It's not unusual to see sharks when you are out at sea, but for one to go to today's extremes, it's most unusual."

Other shark accidents in Australia in 2007:

- A 31-year-old Brisbane man was bitten by a bronze whaler shark on Saturday while spearfishing off a charter boat at Holmes Reef, about 240km east of Cairns in far north Queensland. He sustained a deep, 30cm laceration to his calf and was airlifted by helicopter in a stable condition to the Cairns Base Hospital where he was said to be in "good spirits" (GSAF 2007.10.13).
- On February 2, 2007, Matthew McIntosh, a 26-year-old surfer was bitten by a shark at Shelley Beach, also on the NSW north coast. He suffered cuts to his lower left leg and foot. (GSAF 2007 02.03)
- On January 23, 2007, a 41-year-old Erich Nerhus, an abalone diver working off the NSW south coast was also injured when a three-metre shark closed its mouth over the head and shoulders off Cape Howe, south of the fishing port of Eden. He managed to club the shark's head and eyes with an abalone chisel and it released him (GSAF 2007 01.23).

**SOURCE:** Sydney Morning Herald, October 15, 2007,  
<http://www.smh.com.au/news/National/Woman-escapes-white-pointer-attack/2007/10/15/1192300653262.html>