

ACTIVITY: Surfing

CASE: **GSAF 2001.02.04**

DATE: Sunday February 4, 2001

LOCATION: The incident took place at Brooms Head, near Yamba, New South Wales, Australia

29°40.0'S, 153°18.0'E

NAME: Richard 'Mark' Butler

DESCRIPTION: 48-year-old father of three is a school teacher and has been surfing since 1966.



BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, February 8, 2001

ENVIRONMENT: Yamba is located in northern New South Wales at the mouth of the Clarence River.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 80 metres

TIME: 16h15

NARRATIVE: “The first thing I knew, a shark had me,” said Butler. “I hadn't seen it but it grabbed me and shook me and then let me go. . . and I just thought it's going to come back and have a second go at me and I'll die here now. I hit the water really hard with my hand, perhaps four or five times in an attempt to scare it, and then I started paddling for the beach. A wave came, a beautiful wave that just took me right to the sand. I was thinking really clearly at the time, so I took the leg rope off my board and put a tourniquet around my groin. I held the tourniquet with one hand and I tried to hold my wound together and started walking along the beach.”



INJURY: “The hole in my leg was about as big as a fist”, said Butler. “It mustn't have liked the taste because he let me go - that and he got a mouthful of fibreglass.”

FIRST AID: His first thought was not to allow any sand to enter the wound. Using what little strength he had and his knowledge of first aid knowledge, Mr Butler used his leg rope to make a makeshift tourniquet around his thigh. Noticing a 'chunk of his leg hanging down', he held the loose muscle in place and walked along the beach for a half-kilometer before finding help. “I looked and saw how bad it was and I thought 'I'm going to die here on the beach, I'm not going to make it'... I thought I'd just keep going until I collapsed. I was pretty weak by that stage,” said Butler. Despite losing more than a litre of blood, Butler made it along a bush track and reached help. “Anger and partly my children kept me going,” he said. “I'm glad to be alive. It's terrified me, but I will surf again if I can.” To thank his rescuers, Mr Butler only agreed to talk to television stations if they donated a 'considerable amount of money' to the Lismore-based Life Saver Rescue Helicopter service. “It's a pittance for them [the stations] and I have a lot to thank the helicopter for,” he said.

TREATMENT: Butler was hospitalized in Lismore, New South Wales, where doctors repaired his injury with 80 stitches.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Teeth marks in Butler's surfboard indicate the shark was a bronze whaler shark, about two-metres in length.

SOURCES: Multiple including Illawarra Mercury, February 6, 2001, page 3

NOTE: His experience has not deterred Mr. Butler who began surfing in 1966, nor his family. His eldest daughter, Emma, 17, competed in the Pro-Junior Surfing Series shortly afterwards.

