



EXPERT WARNS

# Great white numbers likely to rise

■ Daniel Mercer

One of WA's top shark experts has predicted there could be an increase in mature — and potentially dangerous — white pointers off the State's coast within the next few years.

Shaun Collin, a research leader at UWA's Oceans Institute, said despite assertions after recent shark attacks it was almost impossible for the number of adult great whites to have grown significantly in WA.

However, Professor Collin said a 1997 ban preventing their slaughter meant it was possible juvenile stocks could be recovering and they would start coming into maturity in as little as four years.

"They have been protected since 1997 and knowing a lot about the reproductive cycles of great whites they in fact take 20 to 30 years to get to maturity," Professor Collin said.

"We predict between 2017 and 2027 that we may in fact start finding higher numbers.

"But the fact is there is really no evidence to suggest (adult) numbers are increasing and even during this period they are still prone

to being taken as by-catch. So it really isn't possible for them to have recovered in any great numbers since they were protected."

The comments by Professor Collin, who along with research partner Nathan Hart is spearheading work into effective shark deterrents, came during a panel discussion of shark experts this week.

Professor Collin told the audience at UWA a spate of shark attacks in WA in which five people died between September 2011 and July last year was tragic.

But he said the causes behind it were largely a mystery, underscoring the need to better understand sharks.

Professor Hart noted that although recent events had increased the risk of a fatal shark attack in WA the chances of it happening were still one-in-500,000.

In comparison, he said, the risks of dying while driving to work represented one-in-100 averaged over a person's lifetime.

Shark scientist Ryan Kempster recalled the failure of authorities to capture a white pointer near Dunsborough earlier this year as evidence of the species rareness.