

Hunting Sharks: Unnatural Justice and Human Revenge

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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Every so often, when a human wades in absurd company with a majestic shark, a predictable spectacle unfolds. The shark, interest piqued, attacks human. The human can be fatally wounded, though not always. Shark is thereby hunted – this, deemed the automatic reaction of the outraged and incensed.

The shark is but one animal, incapable of understanding the false notion of a social contract it is meant to abide it. Similarly, humans assume that notions of revenge and deterrence have some role to play. You killed one of our species, and must account.

Much of this is occasioned by the traditional galeophobic tendencies that have become mandatory in countries in proximity of shark populations. In a statistical sense, being nabbed and placed on the menu of a shark is akin to 1 in 3,748,067. That is the figure arrived at from the University of Florida's Museum of Natural History. Obviously, the figure changes if you are a marine obsessive, tempting fate.

That figure, however, should also be considered along others. The chances of drowning are 1 in 1,134, far greater relative to becoming the gourmet delight of the animal in question. "We never get to the what-are-the-odds part," notes Elizabeth Palermo of *Live Science*, "because the nature of the brain is to take partial information, quickly judge whether there may be danger, and then draw quick, protective or precautionary conclusions before we objectively look at the evidence."^[1]

The shark, however, is deemed wily, much in the way western cultural commentators considered the Oriental inscrutable, outrageous and unbecoming of Western ideals. One has to be sneaky in order to be effective, adjust, adapt to the beast of the sea. "Baited drum lines," goes the ABC report, "have been dropped off Perth's north in the hunt for a suspected five-metre shark which killed a diver".^[2]

The Sea Shepherd crew were far from impressed. Spokeswoman Natalie Banks claimed that this was

"a knee-jerk reaction... it does not prevent these shark attacks. By killing a white shark in Falcon we are not preventing shark attacks from happening again. We need to do things like signage and medical kits at beaches right now."

Obviously, the emphasis there being on human cognisance of the obvious – though prevention has little role to play in the role of mythology, mankind and beast. The shark performs roles it has no clue of, the subject of a script which enrols the enforcers, the killers,

the marauders. The beast shall be found.

Pictures of the deceased are demonstrated as sacred images. There is Ben Gerring, who “died after being attacked by a shark while surfing at Falcon”; and Doreen Collyer, “Edith Cowan lecturer... fatally wounded while diving at Mindarie.” In her husband’s words, “Doreen was a beautiful person and everyone loved her. She was a devoted grandmother, mother and loving wife.”[3]

They have the faces, and the tears of those who lost them. The shark, on the other hand, remains the marine skulking animal, eluding authorities, posing a public menace. Authorities have deemed the shark “a serious threat to public safety.”

According to the premier of WA, Colin Barnett, “It was estimated to be 6m long and if a shark like that stays in the vicinity it is a continuing threat.” A creature in breach of the human social contract imposed upon it. “If that shark stays in the area it will be presumed or judged to be a threat so we reserve that right.”

Catching the creature is not proving to be an easy affair. Drum lines off Mindarie have been deployed with the purpose of eliminating sharks if they fit the appropriate “description”. Barnett has resisted, so far, drawing upon the bloody 2014 policy of catch-and-kill via permanent drum lines which, by his own admission, was “divisive” and did not prove successful. (This is understated – some 172 sharks were killed in the move, with not a single great white among the numbers.)

The shark attacks have, however, given the premier cause for concern. As Fisheries department metropolitan regional manager Tony Cappelluti explained on Monday, “We’ve had [the attacks] months apart but probably never several days apart.”[4] How inconsiderate of them – and their timing.

There is nothing of the Hemingway macho about this. The political fears are far more rudimentary in their material worth. The great whites, in inflicting such fatalities, have given the state “world exposure” that will damage tourist numbers, something that was already affecting various WA beaches.

The response from Barnett is simple: shoot the animal in question. “Shark suspected of WA attack to be shot.”[5] Forget the shark’s role in the great body of the sea – it has been condemned without a jury of peers or the dictates of natural justice. It is merely being punished for its *nature*.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

Notes:

[1] <http://www.livescience.com/51579-fear-of-sharks-psychology.html>

[2] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-06/perth-shark-attack-baited-drum-lines-to-be-set-off-mindarie/7479688>

[3] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-06/mindarie-shark-attack-victim-was-ecu-lecturer-doreen-collyer/7481384>

[4] <http://www.skynews.com.au/news/top-stories/2016/06/06/shark-suspected-of-wa-attack-to-be-shot-.html>

[5] <http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/western-australia/premier-colin-barnett-defends-order-to-kill-sharks-but-rules-out-permanent-drumlines/news-story/9b89292ece35b30038ef6b2bca5bbf2d>

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