



Great white shark

Great white shark/white pointer/mako taniwha/mangō ururoa

New Zealand is recognised as one of the world's hot spots for great white sharks (*Carcharodon carcharias*), along with the waters off California (US), South Africa, Australia and Japan. They breed around northern New Zealand, and move south into colder waters, where the main seal colonies are located.

How big can great white sharks grow?

Males mature between 3.5 and 4.1 m in length and females between about 4.7 and 5.2 m. The largest male reliably measured was 5.5 m long, the largest female was 6.4 m. Maximum weight of females is reported to be about 2500 kg. Adult males are about half the weight of similarly sized females.

What do great white sharks eat?

Great white sharks are apex predators—at the top of the food chain. Their diet includes bony fishes, small sharks, stingrays, eagle rays, blue penguins, seals, sea lions, dolphins and blubber scavenged from whale carcasses.

Photo: B McGregor, SurfIt

Where do great white sharks live?

Around the world, great white sharks live in temperate and tropical waters. In New Zealand waters, great white sharks are found from the subtropical waters north of the Kermadec Islands to the subantarctic Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku, 700 km south of Stewart Island/Rakiura.



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

How long can great white sharks live?

You can tell the age of a great white shark by counting the growth rings along its vertebrae. The maximum age of a shark is unknown, but is likely to be between 30 and 40 years. The oldest age recorded for a great white shark in New Zealand is 23 years for a female caught off North Cape in 1991.

Are great white sharks protected?

Great white sharks are listed on the IUCN Red List as 'vulnerable'. Great white sharks are totally protected in New Zealand waters and aboard New Zealand vessels fishing in international waters. It is illegal to deliberately kill, injure or harass a great white shark. It is not illegal to accidentally catch one provided this is reported to the Department of Conservation as soon as possible.

What are the threats to the great white sharks' continued survival?

Globally, major threats to great white sharks are caused by human actions. These include incidental catch of sharks in commercial fisheries, decline in the abundance of their prey, and the capture of sharks as trophies in commercial and sports fisheries. Direct pressure on great white shark populations comes from them being illegally targeted for their teeth, jaws and fins.

Are great white sharks dangerous to humans?

Great white sharks are known to actively investigate human behaviour—they are bold and inquisitive and often approach fishing vessels and fishing gear—so they are potentially dangerous. There have been 9 recorded non-fatal shark attacks in New Zealand since 1990, and several fatal attacks in the 1960s.

How does DOC work with great white sharks?

DOC is researching the distribution and biology of great white sharks in collaboration with NIWA and international scientists. Recent research involves tagging sharks with satellite tags that collect data used to identify important great white shark habitats in New Zealand waters and any links between the New Zealand great white shark population and those found in other countries.

How can you help?

- Do not discard plastic, nylon fishing line and other types of rubbish at sea. Like whales, sharks and rays can accidentally ingest these, and all species suffer from entanglement in marine debris.
- Release any white shark caught alive and unharmed. If the animal has been hooked, the trace should be cut off as short as possible. If you are fishing for sharks, consider using recurved or circle hooks which make successful live release more likely.
- Report sightings or captures of great white sharks, whale sharks, basking sharks and manta rays to 0800 DOCHOT line (0800 362 468).