

Friday 28 November 2008

SUMMER SHARK PATROLS IN FULL FLIGHT FROM MONDAY

Aerial beach patrols will take to the skies on Monday 1st December as part of the summer Shark Surveillance Program.

Emergency Services Minister, Michael Wright, today revealed, "The fixed wing aircraft, provided by UniSA, will provide regular patrols along the coastline from North Haven to Sellicks between 11.00 am and 8.00 pm weekdays.

"These patrols will complement those already being conducted on weekends and public holidays by Surf Life Saving SA.

"The safety of beachgoers is paramount and it is important that our metropolitan beaches are covered seven days a week over the peak summer period," says Minister Wright.

The aerial patrols will run until the end of March.

The SA Government has pledged \$180 000 towards the initiative, which is in its third year, taking the total contribution to aerial beach patrols to \$320 000 this summer.

Each year approximately 40 national and international students and graduates of the UniSA Aviation Academy participate in the program.

Mr Stephen Phillips, Head of Aviation at the UniSA Aviation Academy says the initiative does more than provide peace of mind to beach users.

"In addition to the obvious community safety outcomes, the partnership provides students and graduates of the UniSA Aviation Academy with the opportunity to gain valuable flying and surveillance experience under operational conditions.

"That experience extends to performing the role of captain of a crew, which they would not normally get as a charter pilot," Mr Phillips says.

During the previous year, UniSA aviators flew almost 700 patrol hours in total.

Mr Darryl Wright, who manages the program on behalf of the South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission, extensive consultation has occurred between the South Australia Police (SAPOL), UniSA, Surf Life Saving SA and other agencies to ensure beachgoers are warned in a timely manner of any potential shark risk.

"If the fixed wing aircraft sights a shark within close proximity of the shore or swimmers, they will commence a circular flying pattern and sound a siren.

“Swimmers should leave the water as quickly as possible once they hear the siren.

“As a matter of course, SAPOL will be notified and if the sighting poses a particular risk to public safety, they will manage the incident in conjunction with other emergency services,” Mr Wright says.

The aerial beach patrols will also compliment water borne patrols and services provided by the SA Police, Surf Life Saving SA, Volunteer Marine Rescue Associations and other government agencies.

Minister Wright says beachgoers can also take simple steps to ensure their own safety.

They include:

- Always swim at a patrolled beach and between the flags
- Never swim alone.
- Avoid swimming at dawn, dusk or night.
- Never swim in murky water.
- Avoid water near fishing activity and avoid schools of fish.
- Don't swim while bleeding.
- Leave the water immediately if a shark is sighted.