

GREAT WHITE SHARK IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

Great white sharks (*Carcharodon carcharias*), also known as white pointers, are widely distributed but rare top predators that mature late and produce few young, making them vulnerable to a variety of threats, particularly fishing.



Great white sharks are listed as 'vulnerable' globally by the IUCN, and are fully protected in New Zealand waters under the Fisheries Act 1996 and Wildlife Act 1953. As a result:

- ❌ Trade in great white shark products in New Zealand is illegal.
- ❌ It is illegal to take or harm great white sharks in New Zealand fisheries waters (out to 200 n.m.). It is also illegal for any New Zealand-flagged vessel to take great white sharks on the high seas. ('Take' includes catching, pursuing by any means or device, and the attempt to take.)
- ⚠️ It is not illegal to accidentally catch a great white shark provided the shark is immediately released alive and unharmed. If the shark is dead and examination of the specimen by a Department of Conservation (DOC) or Fisheries officer is not possible, the intact carcass must be discarded at sea.
- ❌ No part of the shark may be retained.
- ⚠️ Anyone accidentally catching a great white shark must report the details of the capture and fate of the animal to DOC as soon as possible. Commercial fishers should complete and return an MFish Non-fish / Protected Species Catch Return.
- ⚠️ Offenders face fines of up to \$250,000 and 6 months imprisonment.

International trade in great white shark products is regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Anyone wishing to travel outside New Zealand with great white shark products or jewellery requires Wildlife Act and CITES export permits. Without these documents, items will be confiscated.

Several shark species are commonly mistaken for great white sharks in New Zealand waters. This resource has been put together to help fishers identify great white sharks and take the appropriate actions should they accidentally catch one.

Photo: Michelle Yerman

Great white shark information

Great white (*Carcharodon carcharias*)

Adult



Photo: Carl Struthers, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Juvenile



Photo: Clinton Duffy, Department of Conservation

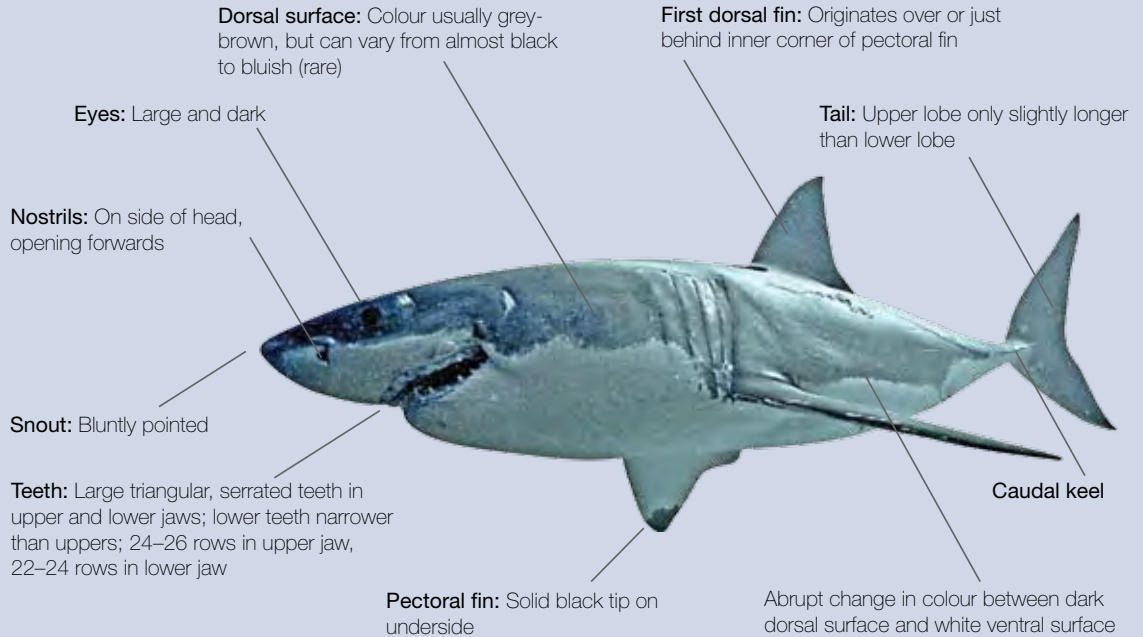


Photo: Michelle Yerman

Species commonly mistaken for great white sharks in New Zealand

Mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*)



Photo: Carl Struthers, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



Photo: Quentin Bennett

- ✗ **Colour:** Indigo blue on dorsal surface, silver on flanks
- ✗ **Snout:** Much sharper
- ✗ **Teeth:** Long, slender, smooth-edged teeth in both jaws
- ✗ **First dorsal fin:** Originates further back, well behind inner corner of pectoral fin

Porbeagle (*Lamna nasus*)



Photo: Carl Struthers, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



Photo: Malcolm Francis, NIWA

- ✗ **Colour:** Similar to mako, sometimes with bronze flush along flanks
- ✗ **Snout:** Very sharp
- ✗ **Teeth:** Small unserrated teeth with lateral cusps
- ✗ **First dorsal fin:** Conspicuous white spot on free rear tip
- ✗ **Tail:** Small secondary keel on upper part of lower lobe

Bronze whaler (*Carcharhinus brachyurus*)



Photo: Carl Struthers, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



Photo: Dave Abbott, Liquid Action Films

- ✗ **Snout:** Broadly rounded
- ✗ **Nostrils:** On underside of snout
- ✗ **Teeth:** Small, narrowly triangular teeth with weak serrations
- ✗ **Caudal keel:** Absent
- ✗ **Tail:** Upper lobe much longer
- ✗ **Eyes:** Pale coloured iris

How you can help

- ✔ Release any great white sharks 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 other sharks, consider using recurved or circle hooks, which make successful live release more likely.
- ✔ If you fish with a set net, stay with your net and avoid extended or overnight sets. Follow the Set Net Code of Practice (www.fish.govt.nz/en-nz/Recreational/Brochures.htm).
- ✘ Do not discard plastic, nylon fishing line or other types of rubbish at sea. Sharks can easily ingest or become entangled in these.

Please report any sightings or captures of great white sharks to Clinton Duffy (sharks@doc.govt.nz; 027 2620383) or the 0800 DOC HOTline (0800 362 468). If you accidentally kill a great white shark, DOC may request that it be landed for scientific examination. Otherwise, the carcass must be discarded at sea immediately.

DOC HOTline
0800 362 468

**Report any safety hazards or
conservation emergencies**

For fire and search and rescue call 111

Photo: Michael Scholl