

Critically endangered grey nurse shark rescued

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By Stan Gorton

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SHARK RESCUE: Rescue operation saw the shark was encouraged into a plastic 'sock', it was then brought to the surface, placed in a stretcher and transferred to a water-filled tank in the boat. Photo DPI

A YOUNG grey nurse shark, which is a critically endangered species, has been saved near Maroubra in a unique rescue by a team of experts that

successfully removed fish hooks from the shark's jaw which was threatening its survival.

Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Senior Research Scientist, Dr Nick Otway, said the 1.2 metre female juvenile grey nurse shark had been spotted at Magic Point by a local diver with two ganged fish hooks embedded in the hinge of its jaw and a gill, with the attached fishing line rubbing the skin near its gills.

The hook in its jaw was also restricting the jaw's movement and interfering with its feeding.

"This was a very difficult and challenging operation and I congratulate the professionalism and dedication of the team rescuing this young critically endangered shark," Dr Otway said.

"This was very much a team effort involving staff from SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium and Manly SEA LIFE Sanctuary, as well as experienced vet Dr Rob Jones and the procedures and protocols were observed by a DPI representative.

"DPI played a key role in the joint operation by providing a permit to ensure the procedure on the critically endangered grey nurse shark could take place and information to assist the veterinary treatment.

"Firstly the shark was encouraged into a plastic 'sock', it was then brought to the surface, placed in a stretcher and transferred to a water-filled tank in the boat.

"The fish hooks and fishing line were carefully removed from its jaw and around its gills and it was given a dose of antibiotics by Dr Jones.



“After the procedure the shark then swam away which was a wonderful sight to see.

“This juvenile grey nurse shark is believed to be about one year old, weighing approximately 10 kilograms and females do not attain sexually maturity until they reach 10 to 12 years of age.

“Sharks of this size are extremely susceptible to capture and handling stress which results in changes to their blood biochemistry and, in some circumstances, causes death.

“Recovering from such changes can take several days and, not surprisingly, the shark was not observed by recreational divers at Magic Point over the weekend.

“Hopefully, the shark is now well on its way to a full recovery.”

Magic Point is one of nine Critical Habitat Sites for grey nurse sharks along the NSW coast, declared in 2002 and there are restrictions on types of fishing and diving which can occur, and these provide additional protection for the species.

“The grey nurse shark became the first protected shark in the world when the NSW Government declared it a protected species in 1984, and it is now protected under Commonwealth legislation and in other states,” Dr Otway said.

“The NSW Government remains committed to the protection of this now critically endangered species and there are thought to only be around 1500 individuals in NSW waters.”

