

Great White Lies

an independent film written, directed, filmed, edited, and narrated by Skyler Thomas

Film Description, One Line:

Shark culling has been proven to be ineffective regarding human safety, so what's the underlying story behind why governments continue to use an outdated practice that needlessly kills a shocking amount of marine life...and why we continue to accept it?

Film Description, Short:

Focusing on the Western Australian Government's decision in January of 2014 to hunt and kill the white shark, a protected species in Australia, filmmaker Skyler Thomas visits Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand to learn more about the shark culling practices in each of these locations.

Interviewing scientists, politicians, surfers, and activists, Great White Lies thoroughly examines the history of shark culling and ultimately asks the question, "Is this really about human safety or is something else taking place here?"

When science, statistics, and history all tell us that shark-culling is a flawed and ineffective strategy in managing human and shark interactions, we are then forced to ask the next logical question; if it doesn't work, why is it still happening?

The apparent answer to that question will leave viewers not only rethinking mankind's relationship with sharks, but with the planet in general.

Film Description, Long:

Western Australia isn't the first place to cull sharks, but in a day and age where we are supposedly making progress in our understanding of sharks, what does it mean outdated practices continue to pop-up rather than disappear? The reputation of sharks is improving in certain circles, but is that being dwarfed by the population who still fear sharks as movie monsters?

When less-lethal and proven alternatives are rejected, not to mention less expensive practices, do those who push for shark culling have political and financial agendas that have nothing to do with public safety?

When countries that have already listed the white shark as a protected species actively hunt that same species, what does that mean about the reality of being a “protected species”?

How did the WA Government get the Federal Minister of the Environment to approve the killing of a protected species? The dirty politics will astound you.

When animal populations recover from decades of over-hunting, and we react by killing those same animals, what does that mean about our willingness to share the planet?

How important of a role does the power of fear on the human psyche play in media manipulation as well as political agendas?

What’s the truth about the success of existing shark culling? And how did shark culling begin in the first place? Both answers may surprise you.

Features footage shot by Skyler Thomas in New Zealand, South Australia, New South Whales, California, Isla de Guadalupe, The Neptune Islands, Western Australia, and South Africa.

Cast:

Features moving footage as well as an incredible collection of interviewees, including:

Scientists:

Dr. Neil Hammerschlag, Dr. Malcom Francis, Dr. Rachel Robins, Dr. Christopher Neff, Prof. Christopher Lowe, Professor Jessica Meeuwig

Shark legends:

Chris Fallows and Michael Rutzen in South Africa and Andrew and Rodney Fox in Australia. David McGuire and Ocean Ramsey in the United States.

Politicians:

Senator Lynn MacLaren and Sen. Rachel Siewert in Western Australia. Councilman Lee Vandervis and Mayor Dave Eggers in New Zealand.

Sea Shepherd:

Jeff Hansen, managing director of Sea Shepherd Australia.

Sharnie Connell, leader of the New South Whales anti-cull movement.

Surfers, divers, and ordinary citizens who fought the cull.

Other Credits:

This film was 90% done by one person, but volunteers stepped in from time to time to help along the way:

Music - Tyler Newman

Additional footage courtesy of Andy Dellios and Jovin Lim

Volunteer camerawork in South Africa by Maarten Jozef Billen

Volunteer camerawork in Western Australia by Rohan Sibon

Additional Notes about Shark Culling:

People say that there are worse things in the world facing sharks than culling programs. That's true. But we are hoping for governments to do the right thing and put an end to shark finning and the illegal trade of protected species. Focusing on the behavior of Western Australia's government is meant to be a wake up call to all of us that we can't sit back and hope and wait for politicians to make the right call or do the right thing. It is a reminder that it is up to each and everyone of us to let our politicians know that we won't tolerate their personal agendas that come at great cost to the rest of us.

Spending time with sharks and most animals for that matter is an insightful and educational experience. I like to think I am fairly knowledgeable regarding sharks, but really that's just in comparison to the larger population who know almost nothing. The truth is that even those of us who make a living studying, filming, or diving with sharks still spend only a tiny fraction of our lives in their world. So, of course we don't understand them. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to fear what we don't understand

and since we have the power to eradicate things we fear, death is often our first line of action.

I'm not saying that sharks don't deserve our fear, however they deserve much more than just fear. In fact, after you spend time learning about them if anything you become filled with all and appreciation that a creature so much more superior than ourselves doesn't kill us more often. Regarding fear, as our disconnection from nature continues to grow there won't be much left that we **aren't** afraid of, therefore killing things on the basis of fear is inherently flawed. We will be left on a planet that consists of nothing more than ourselves, our factory produced food, and our factory produced pets...and that is not a planet I think we really want to be on.

One of the moments in the making of this film that really clicked for me was interviewing pro-cullers in Western Australia who were upset that they had seen one or two white sharks in their lifetime. This led to asking researchers whether or not there were in fact more white sharks. Considering the number of contributing factors that could lead to more sightings of white sharks and not necessarily more actual white sharks it is still hard to say but more importantly is the idea that there are supposed to be more and that the goal of these protection programs was for their numbers to recover. As Dr. Chris Lo pointed out we grew up in a. That was devoid of many animals that had been hunted to the brink of extinction and perhaps now we are only starting to see numbers on the level of what they once were. And if our reaction to recovering populations is to kill those animals doesn't that speak volumes as to whether or not we are willing to share this planet? Now some of us feel that it is our right to do with as this planet as we see fit and we are not required to share it.

But even if you do share that opinion it simply isn't the way it works. We live on a planet that is an intricate system, a beautiful system that is healthiest with the proper mixture of predator and prey. A healthy system benefits us, in fact the collapse of this system could mean our doom or at least an existence that is less than we probably would hope for. The necessity of living sharks has been proven over and over and over again yet this necessity has been traded for the temporary profits of a bowl of soup again and again and again. Or so that resort owners can boast that their beachfront property is "shark free". Or so politicians can leverage their positions based on saving us from a phantom menace.