

Beat: Travel

Large shark kills woman off Australia's east coast

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USPA News - A woman swimming near a beach on Australia's eastern coast was killed on early Thursday morning when she was attacked by a large shark, officials said, while authorities in Western Australia reported finding the body of a missing diver with shark bites. Christine Armstrong, the 63-year-old woman taken by the shark, was swimming with a group of people at about 8:20 a.m. local time on Thursday when she was attacked between Tathra Wharf and Tathra Beach, located on the South Coast of New South Wales.

Surf Life Saving NSW said Armstrong was part of the Tathra Surf Life Saving Club and was swimming with a group of social members and non-members before she went missing. Reportedly, Armstrong had turned back to swim alone when she was attacked, the New South Wales Police Force said. A search for the victim was immediately launched, including rescue boats and a medical helicopter, but police could not confirm human remains had been located. "A number of items have been recovered and taken for forensic examination," said NSW Police spokeswoman Joanne Elliott. Tathra Beach was closed after Thursday's incident and beaches to the north and south are controlled this time of year, but a warning from officials suggest "swimmers to stay clear of the water until further notice." In a brief statement, Armstrong's family said she was an experienced swimmer and loved by many people. "She has been swimming at Tathra Beach for 14 years and was an experienced and committed member of the surf club. She was a senior surf club trainer for many years and swimming brought her much joy and many friends," they said. "She will be sadly missed by all who loved her, especially by Rob, her husband of 44 years." Club members involved in Thursday's incident were receiving counseling to help cope with the tragedy. "It is expected that this unfolding tragedy will impact significantly on the small coastal community," said Surf Life Saving NSW. "The thoughts of all [Surf Lifesavers NSW] are with the victim's family and friends and also with the members still involved in the search effort." Also on Thursday, Australian reported finding the body of a 38-year-old man who disappeared while diving in the Dawesville area of Western Australia on Saturday afternoon. The man was diving with about four other people about 4 to 5 kilometers (2.5 to 3.1 miles) off Dawesville Cut but failed to re-surface, prompting a large search-and-rescue operation. Western Australia Police spokesperson Ros Weatherall said on Thursday that Water Police found the remains of what is believed to be the missing man close the diving site. The cause of death was not immediately clear, but apparent shark bites were found on his body, although his friends stated that they had not noticed any attack when the man went missing. According to statistics from the International Shark Attack File (ISAF) at the University of Florida, sharks killed at least 10 people worldwide last year, following 7 fatalities in 2012 and 13 fatalities in 2011 that represented the highest number in nearly two decades. Surfers are the most affected group, accounting for about 46 percent of unprovoked attacks last year.

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