

# Alcohol is the killer, not sharks

By PAUL BIRD

**ALCOHOL was one million times more likely to cause death to Australian swimmers than the terrifying jaws of a shark, according to a report by lifesavers.**

Though no other sea creature causes more fear than the shark the figures show that the chances of dying from a shark attack are slim compared to road accidents and alcohol-related swimming deaths.

"People in Australia are afraid of sharks, yet the chances of being killed by a shark while swimming is one in five million," said Royal Life Saving Society state treasurer, Mr Jim McClelland.

"But it is the most advertised death in the water and the most gruesome.

"The chances of being killed while driving to the beach are much greater."

The figures are based on the findings of an American doctor who did a world-wide survey of shark attacks.

Documented cases of death in Australian waters show that there have been 51 from Box Jellyfish (all in Queensland), two from Blue Ringed Octopus and one from Cone Shell.

Since 1919 there have been 49 shark attacks in Queensland waters. Twenty-seven of the victims died.

Compare this to 30,000 Australian deaths between 1967 and 1977 in which alcohol was a major factor.

## Silent killer

"Another more deadly killer that takes a terrible toll of Australian lives while swimming is the silent killer — alcohol," Mr McClelland said.

He said studies showed that alcohol contributed to 50 percent of male drownings and that 20 percent of all drownings were attributed to alcohol.

"It takes no mathematical genius to reckon that alcohol is thus one million times as dangerous as a shark.

"Just as water ruins good Scotch, alcohol and swimming definitely do not mix," he said.

He said drunks in speedboats were also a hazard.

"The most dangerous shark to man seems to be the Bronze Whaler," Mr McClelland said.

"The White Pointer gets the treatment from a bet-

ter public relations machine than any of the others because he is the biggest.

"Divers love to film it and therefore it gets the most advertising.

"People do find sharks attractive because of the fear and drama they are associated with."

Loss of blood was the main cause of death for shark attack victims, he said.

There have been two attacks in the Brisbane River. On November 27, 1921, a boy, 8, was dragged from his father's shoulders and disappeared and on December 21, 1960, a man survived an attack.

Mr McClelland, who is a member of the Ithaca Club at Caloundra, said he had seen many sharks cross the Caloundra Bar on their way through Pumicestone Passage, which he described as "chock-a-block".

## 'Disaster'

He referred to the national drinking problem as a "disaster" and backed it up with cold, hard statistics.

In 1977, the Parliamentary Senate Standing Committee found that the percentage of teenagers drinking alcohol once a week or more began at 9.61 percent for 11-12 year old boys and 5.15 percent for 11-12 year old girls, 44.83 percent and 27.5 percent for 17-18 year olds at school, and 68.29 percent and 33.82 percent for the same age group out of school.