

the last 150 years.

'The last known attack by a great white was off Stewart Island last February, when a diver was bitten on the arm while waiting to be picked up by a boat,' says Clinton Duffy.

Backed by these statistics, Alistair Hutt says they don't deserve the tag 'man-eaters' — a better description would be "man-biters".

'Sharks decide whether something is good to eat by biting it,' he says. 'They consider humans too bony to make a good meal — fatty seals are much better. That's why most humans attacked by great whites are spat out.'

'I don't want to underplay it. There's definitely a risk. If you're in the water with sharks around, you're moving into high risk. People just need to show a bit of common sense,' Alistair Hutt says.

Clinton Duffy agrees.

'Swimming near marine mammals increases your chances of being attacked by sharks. It's something that everyone that gets in the water with dolphins and seals should know.'

'It's like going down to a waterhole in Africa at dusk and wandering amongst the lions and crocodiles,' Clinton Duffy says.

Adult great white sharks have only one natural enemy — the killer whale or orca — but their greatest threat comes from humans. In some areas they are now seen only rarely, after years of being hunted for trophy sport, or under a philosophy of 'eat or be eaten'. They are long-lived, slow-breeding creatures, producing small numbers of offspring, which makes them very vulnerable in terms of sustaining their population.

Great whites are protected along the coasts of Australia, California and South Africa, but not yet in New Zealand. However, moves are afoot which could change this.

New Zealand has recently joined the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, which currently includes over 80 countries. The first New Zealand delegation attended the seventh conference of parties to the Convention on Migratory Species in Germany last September.

Mike Donoghue, senior international relations officer for DoC explains:

'New Zealand joined the Convention on Migratory Species primarily motivated by a desire to support greater protection for albatrosses and petrels that are accidentally killed in long-line fishing operations.'

'But at the last meeting of the Convention held in Germany in September 2002, Australia put forward a proposal to add great white sharks to Appendices I and II of



*Shark watcher: Alistair Hutt of the Department of Conservation, Akaroa, scans the harbour in search of the great white shark.*

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the convention. This proposal was passed by acclamation,' he says.

These appendices list migratory species that are endangered, or have a conservation status that would benefit from international agreements for their conservation and management.

'As a signatory to the Convention on Migratory Species, there are implications for New Zealand,' says Mike Donoghue. 'Our current regulations mean that great whites can be fished for, and their body parts — most commonly jaws and fins — can be sold commercially. In the spirit of the convention, this will have to change.'

Alistair Hutt hopes it's the dawn of a new

era for great whites.

'Let's face it, the media sensationalism and widespread ignorance that followed the *Jaws* phenomenon has given the great white shark an undeserved bad rap,' he says.

'The great white is an amazing fish, worthy of our respect and protection. The ocean is the world's last uncharted wilderness, where the great white shark reigns supreme. If you ever get to see one, it's something you will never forget.'

— SARAH MANKELOW is a community awareness officer with the Department of Conservation in Christchurch.



*Another great white shark study by Boyd McGregor.*

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