

# Shark attack victim punched for her

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Lucky ... Linda Whitehurst shows where she was bitten.

Photo: *Brenden Allen*

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A WOMAN knocked from her surf ski by a white pointer shark near Byron Bay fought off the predator with her paddle before making it ashore with just a small bite wound to her wrist.

Measuring about 2.5 metres, the shark tipped 52-year-old Linda Whitehurst off her surf ski at The Pass, one of the most popular surf breaks at the North Coast town.

The attack took place about 11.30am yesterday as Mrs Whitehurst and her husband, Glen, were paddling about 150 metres from shore.

A shaken Mrs Whitehurst said she feared the shark would take hold of her leg before she was able to fight it off. "My ankle's gone, he's going to grab a leg - that's what I thought," Mrs Whitehurst told Channel Ten.

Mr Whitehurst described seeing the shark rise up and bite the back of the surf ski. "[It] literally lifted itself in the back of Linda's boat ... and had the back of the boat in its mouth and gave it a shake," he said.

Mrs Whitehurst said once she was in the water, she repeatedly struck the shark with her paddle until it let go.

"I just kept punching, punching, punching," she said, demonstrating how she thrust the paddle at the fish.

When it retreated, Mrs Whitehurst, from Coopers Shoot, near Byron Bay, was able to make her way to shore. She was taken to hospital and required four stitches in the small wound the shark left on her wrist.

The beach was closed after the attack. Surf Life Saving boat crews spotted the shark about half an hour later and chased it out to sea. The beach was reopened about 2pm, said the northern NSW lifeguard co-ordinator, Stephen Leahy.

News of the attack spread quickly around the Byron Bay area, with popular learn-to-surf classes cancelled and hundreds of beachgoers staying out of the surf.

Authorities said it was unusual to find sharks so close to shore at Byron Bay but Mr Leahy said a similar incident happened last week when a man in a kayak was menaced by a great white at Wategos Beach, the next beach around from where Mrs Whitehurst was attacked. "It's not unusual to see sharks when you are out at sea, but for one to ... go to today's extremes, it's most unusual," he said.