

Shark-hunting drone to relay info to emergency services

1 March 2016, by Nancy Owano



In the news recently has been a shark-spotting unmanned aerial vehicle shaped like a helicopter. Declared the future of rescue in New South Wales, premier Mike Baird said every surf club in the state could eventually have access to the technology, as the UAV can not only spot sharks off the NSW coast but provide general search and rescue functions.

These are military-grade, battery-powered drones, equipped with advanced vision and sensing [technologies](#), including front-mounted camera feeding live footage back to two controllers.

The Daily Telegraph said they can fly up to 100 kilometers and stay airborne for about 150 [minutes](#).

This Westpac "Little Ripper" mini drone was launched by Baird on Sunday. The vehicle is described as the "brainchild" of Kevin Weldon, founding president, International Life Saving Federation. Weldon assembled a team of experts to deliver the trial.

Weldon started developing the system 10 years ago, said *The Telegraph*, "after being inspired by US military drones" credited with saving lives after Hurricane Katrina. The trial will be conducted under the regulatory guidance of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

The Little Ripper was designed to carry a pod for rescue scenarios in marine, snow and on land. The pod is dropped to the people in distress. Pod equipment includes flotation and positioning beacons

The Daily Telegraph noted 14 shark attacks off NSW in 2015, including one fatality. There has been one attack so far this year.

Miles Godfrey in *The Daily Telegraph* walked through development plans of Little Ripper: University of Technology Sydney is developing software to analyze live footage from the drones in order to identify the types of [sharks](#) spotted. The information can then be relayed immediately to [emergency](#) services, beach lifeguards and water users. The drone can be airborne in a few minutes' notice.

Sharks could be detected at night using infra-red technology. Other uses would include monitoring and assessing impacts of natural disasters—floods, storms cyclones and bushfires included.

What's next? "If, as expected, the trials are successful about 40 of the drones are likely to be made available to surf lifesaving clubs around Australia next year," said Godfrey. Operators of the Westpac "Little Ripper" will likely be trained at an academy, which is yet to be set up.

NSW Premier Baird said, "We're investing in unmanned and increased aerial surveillance as part of our \$16 million shark strategy and I look forward to the outcomes of this trial."

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