



5 December 2018

Swanbourne signs to help with shark sightings

Eleven BEN signs have been installed at Swanbourne Beach to assist with shark sightings, after the City of Nedlands was successful in gaining nearly \$3,500 in State Government funding.

The City of Nedlands is the fourth WA local government to install the signs, following the Cities of Mandurah and Kwinana and Shire of Waroona.

Eleven signs are along the main Swanbourne Beach with two planned on Department of Defence land, heading up towards the Nedlands-Cambridge boundary.

The Beach Emergency Numbers (BEN) system – named in honour of fatal shark bite victim Ben Gerring – is a coding system that aims to improve emergency response times by installing signs with unique codes at public beach access points.

The signs were initiated by Ben's brother Rick Gerring after concerns were raised about possible delays from emergency services in trying to locate the closest beach access point.

"These signs provide specific location information, vital when emergency services are deployed in the event of a shark sighting, attack or other beach emergencies," City of Nedlands CEO Greg Trevaskis said.

"Each BEN sign has a unique code based on an area prefix followed by a one to four-digit number.

"The official location, address, suburb and nearest intersection are also on each sign and this information is integrated into computer-aided dispatch systems used by emergency services.

"In the event of an emergency, people dial 000 and quote the unique code and other sign-specific information.

"Where possible, the person waits at the BEN sign until emergency service crews arrive."

The signs also include "beach closed" text on their reverse side to assist with shark sightings, dangerous rips and other situations when the beach may need to be closed.

The program was initially implemented by the City of Mandurah independently in December 2017.

More than 1,100 BEN signs are now planned for WA's coast from Geraldton to Esperance through the government grants program, developed and coordinated by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

Signs are primarily located at beach access points determined by local governments, in consultation with the DPIRD, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and relevant stakeholders.

Rick Gerring added: “With the signs being standard along our coastline, it will mean people will instantly recognise them in the unfortunate event of an incident occurring, relieving unnecessary stress trying to communicate with emergency services.

“Using the BEN signs, the first people on the scene can relay the beach reference number with confidence that the emergency services know the exact location, reducing critical time in attending the scene.

“Although nothing can ever bring my brother Ben back, knowing the BEN signage will save many lives gives me some closure and a legacy that will never be forgotten.”

For more details on where BEN signs are installed, visit the shark activity map on the SharkSmart website at www.sharksmart.com.au/shark-activity.



City of Nedlands Ranger Jessica Bruce, left, Parks Supervisor Irrigation Nathan Deery and BEN Sign Program Co-ordinator Marion Massam from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.



One of the BEN signs at Swanbourne Beach.

ATTACHED: Location of the BEN signs.