About

We aim to advance our understanding of fish and elasmobranch behaviour in homes, across the aquaculture industry, and within zoos and aquariums.

Learning more about fish and shark behaviour through research can give us an insight into their well-being or welfare states.

Zoos and Aquariums

Animal behaviour is widely studied in captive terrestrial animals yet is still understudied in fish and sharks with very few captive fish and elasmobranch studies concentrating on welfare and enrichment. Although the focus has been on many charismatic mammal species, we are now starting to see increased focus on all vertebrates in captivity, including birds, reptiles and fish (Huntingford et al., 2006).

As such, the zoo and aquarium sectors are proactively working to improve standards of care and welfare for all animals and there is a growing movement towards elasmobranch welfare that is resulting in changing exhibit designs, training and learning regimens, and behavioural enrichment taking place more widely.

Research Project

This project aims to advance our understanding of elasmobranch behaviour in captive institutions. We will do this by bringing together a selection of large, forward-thinking institutions in Australia, alongside species experts and welfare scientists to work collectively.

A starting point is to initiate a simple but impactful study across interested institutions to (1) determine baseline levels for elasmobranch movement and behaviour in zoos and aquariums and (2) observe and document elasmobranch response to enrichment.

This enhanced knowledge will support zoos and aquariums in providing innovative environments and enrichments for these animals to express behavioural diversity.

This study proposes to bring together a selection of large, forward-thinking institutions in Australia, alongside species experts and welfare scientists to work collectively to advance our understanding of these animals.

A project advisory group would be established with representation from each organisation and the relevant scientists. This group will help shape the direction of the program and identify priority species or areas of interest to focus in on.

To kickstart this program, a good starting point is to focus on developing our understanding of baseline behaviour in a range of species (multiple individuals across institutions). We would then conduct a simple enrichment study to evaluate any behavioural changes across animals in an effort to provide zoos and aquariums with a robust and innovative program that can be applied to animals in their care.

If this initial study is successful, the program of work can be built on to further advance understanding in this area.

Survey questions:

Name

Email

Institution

Would you like to participate in enrichment research on fish and elasmobranchs?

Do you currently practice enrichment with fish or elasmobranchs?

If yes, how often?

How many individuals are in your care?

Which species are in your care?

Are you able to commit to taking two 10-minute videos and scoring them using Microsoft Excel?