Shark shields for surfboards
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WORLD-first surfboards containing electronic shark shields would be available this Australian summer, their maker said. The devices emit an electronic field surrounding the surfboard which impacts on receptors in a shark's snout.

The impact creates discomfort and if the shark continued into the field it would suffer muscle spasms, forcing it to retreat, the manufacturer, SeaChange Technology Pty Ltd, said.

SeaChange chairman Rod Hartley said the devices would be available this summer in two options - an antenna fixed to a surfboard, or surfboards with the antenna built in.

The electronic field is created by two battery-powered electrode modules about one metre apart, he said.

The world-first technology is similar to shark deterrent leg straps which SeaChange manufactures for divers. The straps are being used by Australian defence and police personnel.

Mr Hartley said the technology had initially been developed in South Africa.

"The South Africans invented the technology and then made a mistake," he said.

"They brought out a product which was a huge, cumbersome thing which no one could wear.

"It was proved effective by abalone divers who strapped them to their cages, that was in 1995 and then nothing happened."

In 1999, Mr Hartley travelled to South Africa and negotiated a world exclusive licence for the technology.

Mr Hartley said it was coincidence the technology was ready for public scrutiny just days after a shark killed 29-year-old surfer Brad Smith in West Australian waters.

He said prototypes of the surfboards had long been scheduled for display at a Sydney surf and dive exhibition which starts Thursday.

"We're very sensitive about appearing to want to capitalise on this young man's death," Mr Hartley said.

"It (the technology) saves lives ... but the chances of a shark attack if you are out there is perhaps one in 500,000.

"But I don't want to be the one."

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