

Basic Detail Report

00049464

Title

Shark Pod diving protection unit Reference Card

Date

1990s

Primary Maker

Pod Holdings Pty Ltd

Medium

Plastic, ink

Dimensions

Overall: 105 x 148 mm, 8 g

Name

Card

History

In the late 1980s and early 1990s scientists from the Natal Sharks Board in South Africa discovered an electronic wave-form that deterred sharks, but did not affect any other forms of marine life. The field is projected by two electrodes which create an elliptical field that surrounds the users. The electronic field is detected by the shark through its sensory receptors, known as the Ampullae of Lorenzini, which are found on the snouts of many sharks. Once detected by the shark, the electronic field causes mild discomfort and muscular spasms resulting in the shark being deterred from the area. Ron and Valerie Taylor worked with the Natal Shark Board and its researchers testing the original prototypes with great success in the late 1980s. However the primary inventor of the unit disagreed with the Shark Board over the commercialisation of his invention and subsequently left the Board taking most of his research with him. Undeterred, after further research, the technology was developed and commercialised into the 'Shark Pod' which was manufactured under license from the Natal Shark Board by a company in South Australia. After additional research and development the company changed its name in 1999 to Seachange Technology and in 2002 released a lighter, more powerful unit called the Shark Shield and stopped production of the Shark Pod. Because of their original role in the testing of the prototypes the Taylor's were given a number of first generation Shark Pods to test. But ,according to the Taylor's, whilst the first proto type units produced by the Natal Shark Board were extremely powerful and effective, following the loss of the original research material and principle scientist, the commercially available Shark Pod were far less effective and after a series of field trials the Taylor's decided not to use the units. Both Ron Taylor and Valerie Taylor (née Heighes) were pioneers in Australian skindiving. Ron took up the sport in 1952 and Valerie in 1956; they met as members of St George Spearfishing Club in Sydney and were married in 1963.

At this period there was little awareness of marine conservation and both Ron and Valerie excelled at the sport of competitive spearfishing. Valerie won the Ladies National Spearfishing Championships three years in a row in the early 1960s, and Ron took out the World Spearfishing Championships in Tahiti in 1965. The Taylors' underwater interests grew to encompass scuba diving and underwater photography. Ron built the first of many underwater housings to take land cameras beneath the sea in 1953. When television came to Australia in 1956 he saw the potential for making underwater news stories and with the help of a friend, who lent him a Bell & Howell 16 mm movie camera, Ron built an acrylic housing for the camera and started selling underwater footage to television and to the cinema newsreel producer Movietone News. In 1962 Ron Taylor received his first award for underwater photography, for a news film called *Playing With Sharks*. In 1963 Ron and Valerie made their first underwater film *Shark Hunter* which was sold to enthusiastic television networks in Australia and the USA. The Taylors quickly gained a reputation for cutting-edge underwater photography and more awards followed, including top honours at the International Underwater Film Festival at Santa Monica, California, and an Underwater Society of America award, the NOGI statuette for Education and Sports, in 1966. Giving up competitive spearfishing in 1969, the Taylors devoted themselves full-time to shark research and underwater photography. They filmed many of the scenes in the American feature film *Blue Water, White Death*, playing two of the four main characters in the film. Shortly afterwards the Taylors spent nine months filming and directing a 39-episode television series called *Barrier Reef* which they quickly followed up with another television series called *Taylors' Inner Space*, featuring their encounters with the marine life of the east coast of Australia and the Western Pacific. As their reputation grew, other underwater filming opportunities presented themselves: *Jaws* (1974) for Universal Pictures; *Sharks* for Timelife Television (1975); *Orca* (1976) for Dino De Laurentis; Peter Weir's *The Last Wave* (1977); *The Blue Lagoon* (1979) for Columbia Pictures, featuring Brooke Shields. The titles proliferated: *Gallipoli* (1981), *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), *In the Realm of the Shark* (1988), *Return to the Blue Lagoon* (1990) and *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1995) among others. The Taylors were also engaged in underwater research into shark behaviour. This led to the development of stainless steel chain mail diving suits (*Operation Shark Bite*, 1982, in which Valerie is bitten on the hand), and electronic shark deterrent equipment that allowed the Taylors to become the first divers ever to film Great White sharks underwater without a cage (*Blue Wilderness*, 1992 and *Shark Pod*, 1996). Passionate and vocal defenders of sharks and the marine environment, the Taylors' have been recognised for their work all over the globe. Valerie received the NOGI award for Arts in 1981. In 1986 she was appointed Rider of the Order of the Golden Ark by his Royal Highness Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands for her work in marine conservation, and in 1997 Valerie won the prestigious American Nature Photographer of the Year award for a picture of a whale shark swimming with a boy in Ningaloo Marine Park. In 1998 Ron and Valerie's book *Blue Wilderness* won the Gold Palm Award at the World Festival of Underwater Pictures in France and in October 2000 Ron and Valerie were inducted into the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame on the Cayman Islands. In Australia, Ron and Valerie have received the Serventy Conservation Medal from the Australian Wildlife Preservation Society and the Lifetime of Conservation Medal from the Australian Geographic Society. In 2003 Ron became a Member of the Order of Australia, joined by Valerie in 2010 for their work in conserving marine animals and habitat.