I spent the summer of 2013 at the University of Queensland (UQ) in Brisbane working on a shark conservation-related project that we entitled “Sharks - friends or foe?” My supervisor was Dr. Ruth Thurston who is a postgraduate researcher in the Marine Palaeoecology Laboratory of the Centre for Marine Studies within the School of Biological Sciences at UQ. Here is a photo of part of the Great Court at UQ:

The project explored whether Queensland’s Shark Control Programme and commercial fishing activities can be reconciled with Australia’s environmental and conservation aims, and also considered whether newspaper coverage of Queensland’s post WWII shark fatalities had sought to set an agenda in support of the implementation of shark control and whether the protection of tourism revenues has taken precedence over environmental and conservation matters in Queensland.

The project was based partly at UQ itself, and partly at the State Library of Queensland (SLQ) in Brisbane, and the data was obtained predominantly from newspapers, either on microfilm records at SLQ, or from the National Library of
Australia’s TROVE online database (up to c.1954), and a variety of other library sources or online databases. I also managed to persuade Queensland’s main newspaper - the Courier Mail - to run a public opinion survey though its internet site to get an indication of people’s views on sharks, Queensland’s shark control programme, and shark conservation generally.

I really enjoyed the opportunity to study a wide range of issues, and to learn more about sharks. The more I have learnt about sharks the more impressed I am with the way they are adapted to their environment, and I have become much more aware of their ecological importance. This awareness has given me a desire to make a contribution to shark conservation in future.

I found UQ to be a great place to do my project research, as the facilities and resources are excellent (although if you do go to UQ, I would suggest that you don’t take a Windows 8 laptop as, at the time of writing, UQ systems are not compatible with Windows 8!). Everyone I met at UQ and SLQ was friendly and willing to contribute to the research, which helped me considerably.

UQ has an impressive campus, with all the facilities of a small town within easy walking distance. If you count all employees and students the main campus can have up to 65,000 people on-site at any one time, so you never need to be short of company! SLQ is in downtown Brisbane – part of the South Bank Cultural Centre, which is only 20 minutes away from the main University campus.

Brisbane seemed to be a pleasant place to live – a rapidly-growing and well-run city with a good transport system. It has plenty of art and culture, good food and leisure activities, if you have any free time after work. The weather during the time I was there (their winter / early Spring) was almost perfect and better than the typical English summer – non-stop sunshine and daytime temperatures typically between 22 and 28 degrees Celsius (not sure I could cope with their summer temperatures though). Finally, here’s where I did some “fieldwork” at the end of the project!