

The day Elise was the only great white hope



RESCUER: Elise Lavers saved fellow kayaker Michael Demasi from a great white shark off the Yorke Peninsula.

Picture: TOM HUNTLEY

JILL PENGELLEY

HEARING a splash in calm waters, Elise Lavers turned her sea kayak and was confronted with the sight of a 6m great white shark.

She paddled towards it — not away — to retrieve friend Michael Demasi from the water while the shark gnawed on his upturned kayak.

For her actions, on April 11, 2012, Miss Lavers, 20, has been awarded a Commendation for Brave Conduct.

She is one of 10 South Australians recognised in today's Australian Bravery Awards.

"When I heard splashing, I thought Michael was just practising a roll but when I turned around, all I saw was a shark biting into the side of the kayak," Miss Lavers said yesterday. Mr Demasi, 29, had

been dumped from his craft by the shark, which nearby fishermen later said was longer than their 5m boat. He clambered on to the end of Miss Lavers' kayak and tried to lift his legs out of the water as she paddled towards a rock shelf.

Miss Lavers, of Normanville, said she since had learned sharks were common in that area around Dolphin Bay, in Yorke Peninsula's Innes National Park.

"I was just trying to paddle as fast as I could," the former state rower said. "But the shark wasn't out to get us. It was just out to find a feed."

"While it was scary, it was also an adrenalin rush and you feel pretty privileged to see such an incredible old animal."

The Flinders University education student said the experience had triggered a keen

interest in sharks and she had applied for an internship to a research program in South Africa. "I feel honoured to be awarded this but I think the real bravery comes from people who experience worse shark attacks and they're still out there fighting for the conservation of sharks, and particularly of endangered great white sharks," she said.

Mr Demasi, of North Adelaide, sustained a small cut to one calf when the shark's teeth first penetrated his kayak.

"The shore was probably about 20 metres away," he said.

"I'm very thankful (for Miss Lavers). "It would have taken me a long time to swim to the shore."

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OUR BRAVE SOUTH AUSTRALIANS

BRAVERY MEDAL

■ **Mr William Thomas DENNY AM**, Tranmere

For entering a burning truck at Wannon, Victoria, on November 14, 1997, to try to rescue the trapped driver.

COMMENDATION FOR BRAVE CONDUCT

■ **Mr Robert Stanley KEARNEY**, Adelaide

For confronting prisoners during a riot, on May 6, 1996, at Yatala Labour Prison, where he was a divisional manager.

■ **Mr Thomas Peter McPEAKE**, Goolwa Beach

For wading into the flooded Finniss River at Currency Creek on July 27, 2012, to rescue a woman.

■ **Miss Elise Nicole LAVERS**, Normanville

For paddling towards a shark to rescue a friend from the water at Dolphin Bay, Yorke Peninsula, on April 11, 2012.

GROUP BRAVERY CITATION

■ **Goolwa Country Fire Service members**

Mr Andrew John GABELL
Mr Cory John JOHNSON
Mr Thomas Peter McPEAKE
Mr Kenneth Roger SMIRKE
Mr Paul John THURKLE
Mr Amos Bradley ZADOW

For their roles in finding a woman trapped in the flooded Finniss River on July 27, 2012, and planning her rescue.