

SWIM WITH THE HUMAN DOLPHIN



A scene from *Great White Shark 3D* starring William Winram (inset). Picture: Toby Zerna

Holding his breath for eight minutes underwater is normal for freediver **William Winram**

For someone who can hold his breath underwater for eight minutes and regularly swims with great white sharks, William Winram has a disarming way of making his job sound normal.

The world record holding freediver and photographer, who appears in the new Imax documentary *Great White*

Shark 3D, talks through his process of going underwater.

"You're on a single breath of air, you need to relax and let your heart rate go down, and you can't do that if you're stressed out. Whatever you've got that's driving you bonkers, you have to let it go."

The Canadian diver discovered as a kid that he could swim at depths of more than 10m without coming up for air. He says holding your breath and diving deep comes more naturally to humans than you might think.

"You have a mammalian diving reflex — the same as dolphins and whales have. So your heart rate slows automatically, your body shunts blood from the arms and legs to prioritise the

heart, the lungs and the brain to safely prolong the amount of time you can spend under there. It's as if you belong."

Despite this, Winram says he's always vigilant underwater — particularly around sharks: "I'm of the opinion that if you're going to enter the sea, then you accept the risk. I'm not ever worried because I make eye contact, I take away their advantage and I stand my ground."

Winram, an advocate for ocean conservation, says his freediving technique is also better suited than scuba diving for encounters with creatures of the deep.

"For a lot of species if you let air out, it's a sign of aggression.

"So scuba diving is not

ideal — it's noisy and it doesn't allow you to move in the water column like freediving does. I've had a great white shark — a big female — think I'm a shark. I was sitting at about 20m and she started rolling her belly at me, which is her saying I'm bigger than you," he says, adding that he used his camera shutter to startle her.

"Half an hour later she came back, swam up and was like: I don't know what you are, but we're cool. We worked with her for a couple of days."

VICTORIA HANNAFORD

● *Great White Shark 3D*, IMAX Sydney, 31 Wheat Rd, Darling Harbour, from \$16.50, imax.com.au, greatwhiteshark3d.com