Working Group: Long-nosed fur seals in the Coorong and Lower Lakes

Communiqué No. 13

The fourteenth meeting of the working group was held on 19th July 2017 in Adelaide. The following representatives were present at the meeting:

- Sandy Carruthers, Group Executive Director Science, DEWNR as Chair;
- Prof. Gavin Begg, Research Chief, SARDI;
- Prof. Simon Goldsworthy, Sub Program Leader Threatened, Endangered and Protected Species, SARDI;
- Dr Belinda McGrath-Steer, Fisheries Manager and Manager Fisheries and Legislation Reform, PIRSA;
- Neil MacDonald, Southern Fishermen's Association;
- Neville Jaensch, Mayor, Coorong District Council;
- James Brook, proxy for Craig Wilkins, Conservation Council SA;
- Vicki Linton, A/Director Conservation, NRM and Protected Area Policy, DEWNR;
- Michael Garrod, Director Community Engagement, DEWNR;
- Mike Greig, Senior Ecologist Abundant Species and Sustainable Use, DEWNR;
- Renate Velzeboer, Ecologist Marine Interactions and Wildlife Biosecurity, DEWNR; and
- Margaret Phillips, Administration Support, DEWNR.

SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Board, SA Water, South Australian Tourism Commission, South Australian Museum and Alexandrina Council representatives were all apologies for the meeting.

MONITORING THE ABUNDANCE AND MOVEMENT OF LNFS

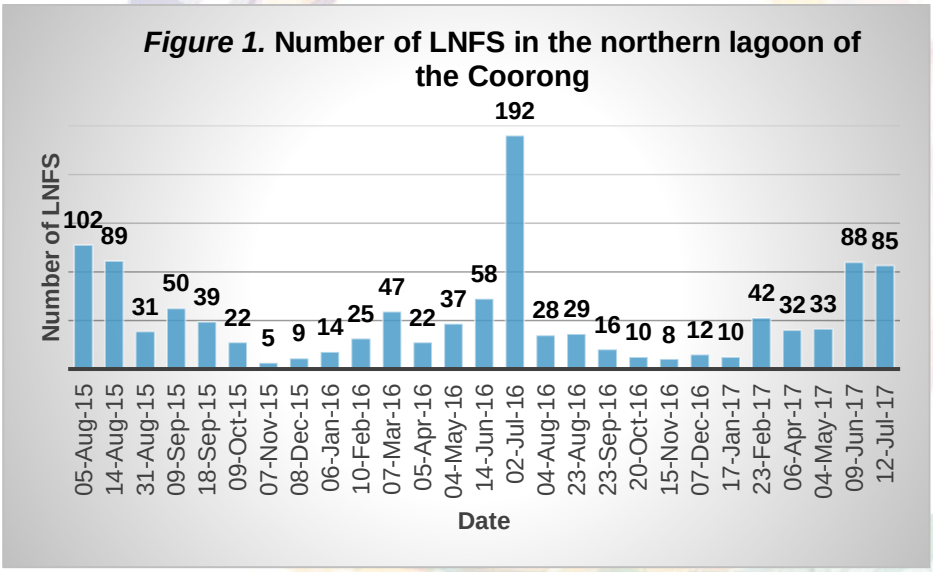

Figure 1. **Number of LNFS in the northern lagoon of the Coorong**

- DEWNR conducted monitoring for the distribution and abundance of LNFS in the northern lagoon of the Coorong on the 9th June and 12th July 2017 (See Figure 1). A total of 88 and 85 LNFS were counted on these days, respectively. The majority of LNFS were seen in the Coorong channel in June and at the Murray Mouth in July. These numbers are an increase compared to the previous months. It reflects the

seasonal fluctuation in LNFS numbers in coastal waters observed last year and elsewhere in the state, i.e. numbers peak during winter and then decline prior to the commencement of the breeding season in summer.

- DEWNR is looking for trends in the abundance and distribution of LNFS in the northern lagoon of the Coorong throughout the year. Anyone is welcome to come along on a monitoring trip. Please register your interest by phoning 0429 487 814.

MANAGING SEAL-FISHER INTERACTIONS

- SARDI and a commercial Lakes and Coorong fisher conducted final trials with the double-winged fyke net, which was modified further, in June 2017 to test the appropriateness of this net for the Lakes and Coorong Fishery.
- SARDI presented on the outcomes of all the trials conducted with the fyke nets and the haul nets as part of the research project on '*Developing alternative strategies for managing seal-fisher interactions in the Lakes and Coorong Fishery*', which was funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation with contributions from SARDI and DEWNR.
- Field testing with the powered and manual haul net was undertaken over three separate weeks. A total of 19 shots were made with the powered haul net and 10 shots with the manual haul net in the lower lakes and Coorong estuary during the trials. The nets are hauled with either a powered winch or manually. Relatively small quantities of target species landed in the pocket of the haul net. There were interactions with LNFS on two occasions in the Coorong estuary and seal deterrents were used to scare them away. There was no damage to fish or nets. The power haul net has a substantial set-up cost and requires a larger boat. The manual haul net can be used from existing boats and may be a viable alternative to gill netting in some situations, e.g. if aggregations of fish are visible and calm weather conditions are available. Some fishers have indicated they would be exploring this option further.

Figure 2. Fishers working a manual haul net in Lake Alexandrina as part of the research project testing alternative fishing methods for the Lakes and Coorong Fishery
Photo credit: Jason Earl (SARDI Aquatic Sciences)

- The single and double winged fyke nets were tested at multiple locations in the Coorong estuary and lower lakes. The fyke nets work by funneling fish into a netted chamber. The fyke nets were deployed in productive fishing areas over a 24 hour period. There were a total of 22 net sets. A range of species landed in the fyke nets, but the fish weren't of a legal size. There were some interactions with the LNFS and some damage was observed to the fish caught in the nets. There was no damage to the fyke nets. The fyke nets are not commercially viable for the Lakes and Coorong Fishery due to the very low catch rate of fish.
- Gill netting will remain the primary fishing method for the Lakes and Coorong Fishery.
- DEWNR has distributed permit applications to the fishers for the use of underwater seal deterrents to scare LNFS from fish and nets. Approximately 1,000 underwater seal deterrents are left over from the research trials and DEWNR has purchased another 6,000 units, which will be made available to qualified permit holders in the Lakes and Coorong Fishery. The qualified permit holders will be responsible for bulk storage and distribution of the underwater seal deterrents and will pay for the units when used in order to self-fund future underwater seal deterrent purchases. DEWNR will provide training to the fishers on the use of the underwater seal deterrents once permit applications of individual fishers in the Lakes and Coorong Fishery have been received, so that they can become qualified permit holders.
- LNFS Working group members held a discussion on quantifying the impacts of LNFS on the Lakes and Coorong Fishery, which at this stage cannot be accurately estimated. PIRSA, SARDI and the Southern Fishermen's Association will be working together to discuss a way forward with the assistance of the Coorong District Council.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Frequently asked questions, an option for the community to raise a question and the previous Communiques from the LNFS working group can be found on the DEWNR website: www.environment.sa.gov.au/seals.
- The next meeting of the LNFS working group has been scheduled for 5 October 2017.