

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

Communiqué No. 15

The sixteenth meeting of the working group was held on 28th February 2018 in Adelaide. The following representatives were present at the meeting:

- Sandy Carruthers, Group Executive Director Science, Department for Environment and Water (DEW) as Chair;
- Prof. Gavin Begg, Research Chief, SARDI;
- Prof. Simon Goldsworthy, Sub Program Leader Ecosystem Effects of Fishing and Aquaculture, SARDI;
- Dr Belinda McGrath-Steer, Fisheries Manager and Manager Fisheries and Legislation Reform, PIRSA;
- Neil MacDonald, Southern Fishermen's Association;
- James Brook, proxy for Craig Wilkins, Conservation Council SA;
- Matt Ward, Director Conservation, NRM and Protected Area Policy, DEW;
- Michael Garrod, Director Community Engagement, DEW;
- Lucy Dodd, Manager Parks and Sustainable Landscapes, Natural Resources South East;
- Jason Higham, Senior Policy Officer, Conservation and Sustainability, DEW; and
- Renate Velzeboer, Ecologist Marine Interactions and Wildlife Biosecurity, DEW.

The Coorong District Council, SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Board, SA Water, South Australian Tourism Commission, South Australian Museum and Alexandrina Council representatives were apologies.

COMMUNICATIONS

- DEW is looking to reinstate the community phone link-up as a way to get information to and from the community on Long-nosed fur seals (LNFS) in the Coorong and lower lakes.

Please contact Natural Resources SAMDB on 8532 9100 to register your interest in the community phone link-up with DEW. The call number will be free of charge.

MONITORING THE ABUNDANCE OF LNFS

- DEW conducted monitoring for the distribution and abundance of LNFS' in the northern lagoon of the Coorong on the 11th November and 14th December 2017 and 2nd February 2018. A total of 10, 15 and 27 LNFS' were counted on these days, respectively. The majority of LNFS' were seen at the barrages. These numbers reflect the seasonal fluctuation in LNFS numbers in coastal waters observed in the last few years (See Figure 1) and elsewhere in the state whereby numbers are low in summer months and increase throughout autumn and winter when some juvenile and subadult males move into coastal waters to feed.
- DEW is looking for trends in the abundance and distribution of LNFS' in the northern lagoon of the Coorong throughout the year. If you are interested in volunteering for future monitoring trips, please register your interest by phoning 0429 487 814.



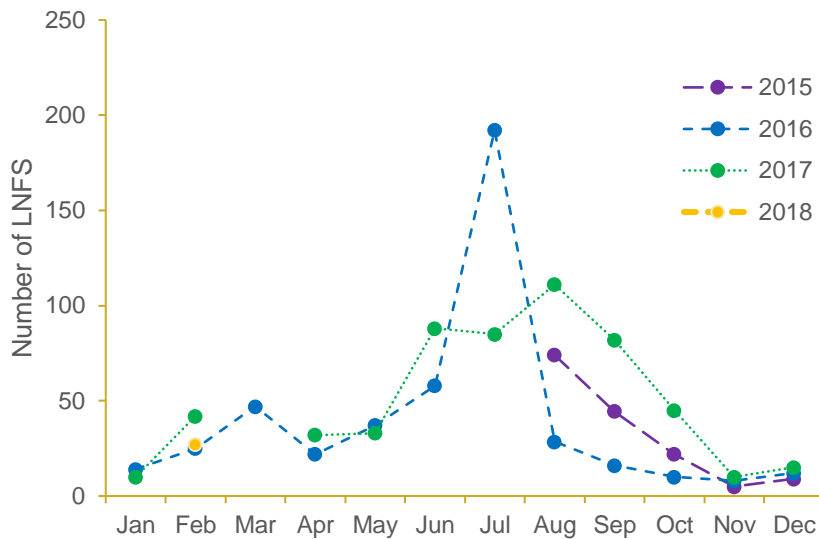


Figure 1. Number of LNFs' in the northern lagoon of the Coorong by year from August 2015 until February 2018.

- SARDI gave a presentation on the LNFs survey that was carried out in the Cape Gantheaume Wilderness Protection Area on Kangaroo Island. This is the closest main breeding site for the LNFs' to the Coorong, and contains about one-quarter of South Australia's LNFs population. This survey was in its 30th year. A team of 28 people worked over 6 days to estimate pup production using the mark-recapture method. The total pup production for the 2017/18 breeding season was estimated to be 5,820. This represents an increase of about 20% over the previous seven seasons where pup production has averaged about 4,800.

MANAGING SEAL-FISHER INTERACTIONS

- DEW in conjunction with the Southern Fishermen's Association held a safety training workshop on the use of a seal deterrent, the seal control unit (SCU), on 21st December 2017, which was attended by eleven fishers.
- Safework SA and DEW have issued permits for the use of the SCUs to a number of fishers that participated in the safety training workshop. SCUs have now been distributed to fishers for their use. The DEW is planning to undertake a review of the SCUs effectiveness in conjunction with the Industry in six months time.

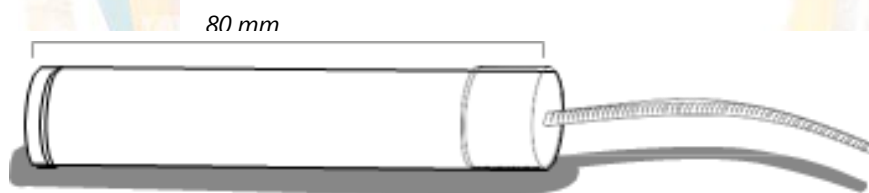


Figure 2. Seal Control Unit

- SARDI have submitted an expression of interest for funding to the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation titled '*Seal-fisher-ecosystem interactions in the Lower Lakes and Coorong: understanding causes and impacts to develop longer-term solutions.*' The proposal seeks to assess the economic and ecological impacts of the LNFS' on the commercial Lakes and Coorong Fishery and ecosystem, and identify further options for mitigating their impacts and reducing the attractiveness of the region as a place for LNFS' to visit. The research project will utilise a range of methods to improve information on seal-fisher-ecosystem interactions. This includes improved fisher log-book reporting; population and haul-out availability and suitability surveys; the importance and limitation of suitable haul-out sites; satellite tracking, dietary investigation to determine where, when and on what LNFS' are predating; and ecological modelling.

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 DEW website: www.environment.sa.gov.au/seals.

