

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

Communique No. 16



The seventeenth meeting of the Long-nosed fur seal working group was held on 13 December 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. Simon Goldsworthy, Sub Program Leader Ecosystem Effects of Fishing and Aquaculture, SARDI;
- Jon Presser, Manager Fisheries and Legislation Reform, Primary Industries and Regions SA;
- Neil MacDonald, Southern Fishermen's Association;
- James Brook, proxy for Craig Wilkins, Conservation Council SA;
- Peter Shaughnessy, South Australian Museum;
- Michael Garrod, Director Community Engagement, DEW;
- Lucy Dodd, Manager Parks and Sustainable Landscapes, Natural Resources South East;
- Karl Hillyard, Senior Ecologist Abundant Species, DEW; and
- Renate Velzeboer, Ecologist Wildlife and Biosecurity, DEW.

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

## Monitoring the abundance and distribution of LNFS

- DEW conducted monitoring of the abundance and distribution of LNFS' in the northern lagoon of the Coorong every 4-6 weeks between 9 February and 6 December 2018 to determine their trend throughout the year. The highest number of LNFS was observed on 22 June (157) and lowest on 6 December 2018 with five LNFS (See Figure 1, yellow dotted line).
- The trend in LNFS abundance in 2018 appears to be similar to previous years, and reflects the seasonal variation typically observed in coastal waters in the last few years and elsewhere in the state. That is, abundance peaks during autumn and winter when some juvenile and sub-adult males move into coastal waters to feed; and then declines prior to the commencement of the breeding season in summer.
- The majority of LNFS were observed at Tauwitchere and Goolwa barrages, except for monitoring conducted in June and July 2018 when LNFS numbers were high and the majority of seals were found at or near the Murray Mouth.
- If you are interested in volunteering for future monitoring trips, please register your interest by phoning 0429 487 814.

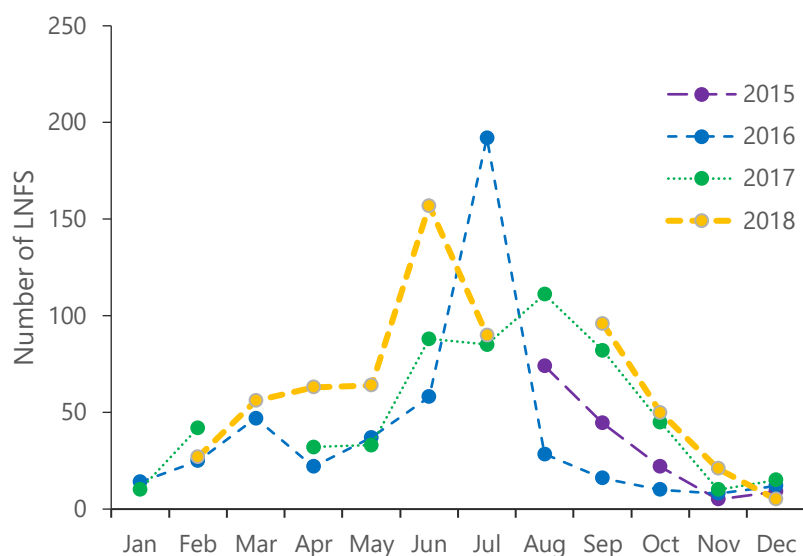


Figure 1. Number of LNFs' in the northern lagoon of the Coorong by year from August 2015 until December 2018.

## Managing seal-fisher interactions

- DEW has reviewed the usage and efficiency of the Seal Control Units (SCU), which were rolled out in the commercial Lakes and Coorong Fishery (LCF) in February 2018 to temporarily discourage LNFs from commercial fishing gear without harming them. The SCUs were deployed on 44 occasions, of which thirty two deployments (73%) resulted in the LNFs moving at least 5 m away from the net and on twenty five occasions (57%) moving at least 10 m away. LNFs did not respond to the deployment of the SCU on ten occasions (23%). Some SCUs failed to detonate and based on the advice from the supplier, the SCU may not have been stored or deployed correctly. DEW will be holding refresher training to fishers of the LCF in early 2019; and renew permits and purchase new SCU stock when required.
- SARDI announced that the research project on '*Seal-fisher-ecosystem interactions in the Lower Lakes and Coorong: understanding causes and impacts to develop longer-term solutions*' has been funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation. The total cost for this research project is \$300K with in-kind contributions by SARDI, SFA and DEW and a cash contribution of \$66K by the DEW.
- The research project seeks to assess the economic and ecological impacts of the LNFs' on the LCF and ecosystem, and identify further options for mitigating their impacts and reducing the attractiveness of the region as a place for LNFs' to visit. It will utilize 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 preying; and ecological modelling. This research project will commence in early 2019.
- The SFA informed that an electronic logbook system for the entry and submission of daily fishing logs is in development for the LCF. It will include data on catch and effort and will be rolled out in early 2019.

## Further information

Frequently asked questions, an option for the community to raise a question and the previous Communiqués from the LNFs working group can be found on the DEW website: [www.environment.sa.gov.au/seals](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/seals).