

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

Communiqué No. 2

- The second meeting of the working group was held on Thursday, 24 September 2015 in Adelaide with representatives from the
 - Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR): Sandy Pitcher as Chair, Brenton Grear, Mike Greig, Renate Velzeboer
 - Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA): Alice Fistr
 - SA Research and Development Institute (SARDI): Simon Goldsworthy
 - Southern Fishermen's Association (SFA): Neil MacDonald
 - SA Water: Garry Fyfe
 - South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC): David Lake
 - Coorong District Council (CDC): Mayor Neville Jaensch
 - Alexandrina Council (AC): Barry Featherston
 - Conservation Council of SA (CCSA): Craig Wilkins and James Brook (observer);
 - SA Museum (SAM): Peter Shaughnessy; and
 - SA Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board (SA MDB NRM Board): Roger Wickes.

The Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (NRA) and DEWNR's Natural Resources South-East (NR S-E) sent their apologies for this meeting and are expected to attend future meetings.

- The working group was provided with information on monitoring the abundance and distribution of Long-nosed fur seals (LNFS) in the Coorong and Lower lakes. The monitoring was a joint effort by DEWNR, SA Water and the Environment Protection Authority. The results from the areas monitored have shown that
 - the highest number of 102 LNFS was recorded on 14th August 2015 and numbers have decreased since to less than 40 LNFS in September 2015;
 - LNFS were consistently present at three locations in the Coorong; that is the Murray Mouth, Goolwa and Tauwichee barrages.
- The working group identified its role is to facilitate processes to enable fishers, other industries and the community to better manage the impacts of seals on fisheries and the ecology in the region because the impacts are not driven merely by the numbers being observed.
- DEWNR facilitates monitoring of waterbirds, which includes the Australian pelican, for 72 locations in the Coorong, Lower lakes and Murray Mouth area to collect information on:
 - species identity,
 - the number of individuals,
 - their behavior, such as roosting, foraging, swimming or calling; and
 - evidence of nesting or breeding behavior.



This monitoring will start in October and data will be collected each month until April 2016. This monitoring has been conducted every year since 2000.

- Although monitoring the number and distribution of LNFS and water birds does not provide us with information on the negative interactions experienced by fishers or water birds, such as the Australian pelican, it does provide us with useful information to assist with making management decisions.
- To observe negative interactions of LNFS, including harm to the Australian pelican, DEWNR staff and Ngarrindjeri representatives will be installing wildlife monitoring cameras near pelican breeding sites at the beginning of October.
- The working group was informed about the tagging of a LNFS in the Coorong with a satellite tracker by SARDI to study its movements. Preliminary results have shown that the juvenile LNFS moved in and out of the Coorong several times and travelled between the Coorong and Port Elliot. Dietary analysis has begun as part of the current Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) funded project.
- Minister Bignell has waived the net component of Lakes and Coorong Fishery licence holders, thereby providing temporary financial relief, and approved the following temporary changes to management arrangements for the 2015/16 financial year:
 - o Increasing the season in which hauling nets may be used;
 - o Permitting the use of drum nets by all licence holders; and
 - o Increasing the number of relief days per licence holder from 28 to 90 days.
- Almost \$260,000 of funding has now been secured from the state government and the FRDC for a research project to investigate alternative fishing gear and practices and to trial various seal deterrents to reduce negative impacts of long-nosed fur seals on Lakes and Coorong fishers. It is expected that the different types of seal deterrents will be trialed in November 2015 once all the legal obligations and approvals for their use in South Australia have been met.
- Rural Business Support, which incorporates Rural Financial Service SA, has offered to assist fishers with free, independent and confidential financial information and business support. They can also refer fishers to other professional service providers, such as personal and social counsellors, accountants and financial advisors who are able to assist with issues that the financial counsellors do not cover. Rural Business Support can be contacted on 1800 836 211. The Coorong District Council has a community wellbeing program that complements the Rural Financial Service SA process.
- The SA Tourism Commission highlighted the relevance of fur seals to tourism operators in the Coorong. In recent years tourism operators have had to manage negative perceptions of the River Murray and Lakes, in part due to media attention on the drought, lower water levels and river mouth closure. Proposed actions to mitigate impacts from fur seals need to be well researched and communicated sensitively so as not to undermine the appeal of the region and the local tourism industry. This is particularly relevant given the current focus on South Australia's nature based tourism experiences.



- Frequently asked questions from the community and their answers are published on the DEWNR website: http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/managing-natural-resources/plants-and-animals/Living_with_wildlife/seals. More questions and answers will be added in the near future. An enhanced communication program will be developed for consideration by the working group.
- The working group will meet monthly and the next meeting is scheduled for 22nd October.

