

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

Communiqué No. 3

- The third meeting of the working group was held on Thursday, 22 October 2015 in Adelaide with representatives from the
 - Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR): Sandy Pitcher as Chair, Grant Pelton, Michael Garrod, Mike Greig, Nick McIntyre, Renate Velzeboer
 - Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA): Alice Fistr
 - SA Research and Development Institute (SARDI): Gavin Begg and Simon Goldsworthy
 - Southern Fishermen's Association (SFA): Neil MacDonald
 - SA Water: Garry Fyfe
 - Coorong District Council (CDC): Neville Jaensch
 - Conservation Council of SA (CCSA): Craig Wilkins and James Brook;
 - SA Museum (SAM): Peter Shaughnessy; and
 - SA Murray Darling Basin NRM Board (SA MDB NRM Board): Roger Wickes.

The Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (NRA), the South Australian Tourism Commission and the Alexandrina Council sent their apologies for this meeting.

- A revised draft *Communications plan for Long-nosed fur seals in the Coorong and Lower lakes* was tabled. Working group members have been asked to contribute ideas about reaching specific target audiences with information about activity underway.
- The working group received an overview of long-nosed fur seal distribution, abundance and ecology. Surveys conducted by SARDI and SAM have shown that the population of Long-nosed fur seals in South Australia was estimated at about 97,000. The breeding colonies closest to the Coorong and Lower Lakes are found on Kangaroo Island, where approximately 10,000 LNFS pups were born during the 2013/14 breeding season.
- SARDI provided an update on the tagging of LNFS with satellite trackers to monitor their movement. The juvenile LNFS that was deployed with a satellite tracker in the Coorong moved in and out of the Coorong and to Port Elliot on numerous occasions. Satellite trackers were also placed on LNFSs from West Island and Kangaroo Island. Some travelled in a southerly direction to the continental shelf before returning to their respective haul out sites. One LNFS from West Island has made multiple trips into the Coorong and Lake Alexandrina.
- The working group was provided with information on research projects currently underway or recently completed by SARDI:
 - *Developing alternative strategies for managing seal-fisher interactions in the South Australian Lakes and Coorong Fishery* to look at alternative fishing gear and practices and to trial various seal deterrents.



- o *Assessment of the impacts of seal populations on the seafood industry in South Australia.* This includes looking into the importance of commercial and recreational fish species in diets of seals; the impacts of their consumption on fish production; tracking studies to assess overlap and interactions with aquaculture and fishing activities; industry and stakeholder questionnaires to assess the costs associated with mitigating seal interactions with finfish aquaculture, and perceptions of impacts of seals on seafood and ecotourism industries and the broader ecosystem.
 - o *Monitoring of Pinniped populations on Kangaroo Island: 2015-2018.* A component of this project maintains annual LNFS pup production surveys in the Cape Gantheaume Wilderness Protection Area. A survey will also be undertaken of the emerging Australian fur seal population on North Casuarina Island.
 - o *Uncoupling oceanographic and life history drivers to alternate foraging strategies in long-nosed fur seal* (PhD project)
- The working group discussed options to reduce numbers of long-nosed fur seals in the Coorong and restrict access into the Lower lakes and agreed that non-lethal, ethical measures to reduce seal abundance in the Lower lakes and Coorong should be investigated. A sub-group of the LNFS working group will be set up out-of-session to look into modifying man-made structures to prevent seals moving from the Coorong into the Lower lakes with membership from SA Water, PIRSA, SARDI, SA Museum and DEWNR. SARDI will review the use of electronic barriers as a way of deterring seals.
 - WG members were provided with an update on the non-lethal seal crackers and the legal processes involved for their use in South Australia. Safework SA has provided approval, identified a classified route for import of the seal crackers into South Australia and has offered a storage facility. DEWNR will hold the import license and each person is required to have completed a training course before using the seal crackers, which will be held in November.
 - Wildlife monitoring cameras have been installed at a breeding colony of the Australian pelican to observe breeding success and negative interactions of LNFS with the pelicans. Pictures downloaded from the cameras to date have shown that pelican breeding is going well and that there have not been any interactions of the pelicans with the Long-nosed fur seals at the breeding colony.
 - The Coorong District Council informed the working group members that although Minister Bignell provided temporary financial relief, there are other pressing needs for additional financial support for commercial (wild) fishers. The commercial fishers are not eligible for financial support under the Exceptional Circumstances program rolled out by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources because they tend to work in isolation and are not considered a "farming business". PIRSA will investigate options for commercial fishers to access support schemes that are available to primary producers.
 - Frequently asked questions and answers regarding LNFS are published on the DEWNR website: http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/managing-natural-resources/plants-and-animals/Living_with_wildlife/seals. An additional section has been created specifically for questions raised by the community.
 - The working group will meet monthly and the next meeting is scheduled for 26th November.

Please distribute this Communique to anyone that may be interested.

