

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

## Communiqué No. 4

- The fourth meeting of the working group was held on Thursday, 26 November 2015 in Adelaide with representatives from the
  - Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR): Sandy Pitcher as Chair, Brenton Grear, Michael Garrod, Denise Fowles and 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): Vincent Cammell
  - Conservation Council of SA (CCSA): Craig Wilkins and James Brook; and
  - South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC): David Lake;

The Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (NRA), the South Australian Museum and the Alexandrina Council were an apology for this meeting.

- An updated draft *Communications plan for long-nosed fur seals in the Coorong and Lower lakes* was tabled following comments received from working group members. One of the actions described in the plan is to hold a community open day, which will be held on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015 from 2 – 7 pm at the office of the Coorong District Council at Meningie. The community will be able to share information and join the conversation on non-lethal actions taken or proposed by the South Australian government to mitigate the impact of the long-nosed fur seal (LNFS) in the Coorong and lower lakes.
- As part of a Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) funded project led by SARDI, the working group received an overview on *Social and economic impacts of long-nosed fur seals on industry and marine stakeholders* by Dr Melissa Nursey-Bray, University of Adelaide. As part of this Statewide perception study, industry and marine stakeholders were surveyed via questionnaire and subsequently followed up with an interview. Results confirmed that LNFS interactions are an emotionally charged subject, which require effective management and strategic attention.
- The working group received an overview of LNFS distribution and abundance. The latest monitoring count by DEWNR showed a further reduction of the number of LNFS' in the Northern lagoon of the Coorong to five individuals. This decline reflects the natural fluctuation in LNFS numbers in coastal waters seen elsewhere in the State, i.e. numbers peak during winter and then decline prior to the commencement of the breeding season in December.
- The Steering Group for the SARDI-led FRDC and SA Government funded research project on developing alternative strategies for managing seal-fisher interactions in the Lakes and Coorong fishery held its first meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> October. Several alternative gear types and a seal deterrent, the



"seal cracker", were identified to trial during a pilot study. Fishers are leading the building of new gear types to trial. PIRSA together with the SFA will investigate potential funding sources for introducing new gear types to the fishery, if successfully trialed as part of the research project.

- DEWNR and SARDI with assistance from two experts from Tasmania scheduled training to fishers in the use of seal crackers on the 27<sup>th</sup> November. Seal crackers have been used successfully in deterring seals in Tasmania for 20 years. Trials in the use of the seal crackers with current fishing methods will be postponed to next year when the LNFS' are expected to return in the Coorong.
- SARDI provided an update on the tagging of LNFS with satellite trackers to monitor their movement. One LNFS from West Island (near Victor Harbor) has made multiple trips into the Coorong and Lake Alexandrina and spent approximately one month on West Island. The juvenile LNFS that was deployed with a satellite tracker moved in and out of the Coorong on numerous occasions and has now travelled in a southerly direction towards the continental shelf for about 800 kilometres.
- A sub-group of the LNFS working group with membership from SA Water, PIRSA, SARDI, SA Museum and DEWNR investigated options to modify man-made structures in the Coorong to restrict movement of LNFS' from the Coorong into the lower lakes and reduce the available haul out sites. The fishways at Tauwichee barrage, Boundary Creek and Goolwa will be modified with barriers to prevent the LNFS from hauling out on these structures and moving into Lake Alexandrina. A fence will be erected on the access road at the eastern side of Tauwichee barrage, the eastern side of Ewe Island barrage and the Hindmarsh Island side of the Goolwa barrage to prevent LNFS' from hauling out and moving into Lake Alexandrina. SA Water will be conducting this work and DEWNR will be providing the funding. SA Water will be installing wildlife monitoring cameras at the fishways and access road to Tauwichee Barrage and provide images to DEWNR to monitor the success of the modifications at these locations.
- SARDI provided an overview of electronic barriers used in the USA to deter seals. Also, Seal and Shark Protection Pty Ltd presented on an electronic seal deterrent device that has been successfully trialed in deterring seals from salmon farms in Tasmania. Both these options are still in an experimental stage and further research is required before they could be used more widely.
- Wildlife monitoring cameras remain functional at a breeding colony of the Australian pelican in the Coorong to observe breeding success and negative interactions of LNFS with the pelicans. More pictures have been downloaded from the cameras in the last month. Pictures to date have shown that there have not been any interactions of the pelicans with the LNFS at the breeding colony. The pelican breeding is progressing well with many juveniles present, but the breeding event is naturally winding up.
- The LNFS webpage on the DEWNR website has a new web address: <http://www.environment.gov.au/seals>. The LNFS webpage includes frequently asked questions, an option for the community to raise a question and the previous Communiques from the LNFS working group. New Communiques will be added when available.
- The next meeting of the LNFS working group is scheduled for the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

Please distribute this Communique to anyone that may be interested.

