

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

## Communiqué No. 11

The twelfth meeting of the working group was held on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2017 in Adelaide. The following representatives were present at the meeting:

- Dr Sandy Carruthers, Group Executive Director Science, DEWNR as Chair;
- Dr Matthew Ward, Executive Director Conservation, NRM and Protected Area Policy, DEWNR;
- Prof. Gavin Begg, Research Chief, SARDI;
- Prof. Simon Goldsworthy, Sub Program Leader Threatened, Endangered and Protected Species, SARDI;
- Dr Belinda McGrath-Steer, A/Program Leader, Aquaculture Environment Program, PIRSA;
- Dr Peter Shaughnessy, South Australian Museum;
- Neil McDonald, Director, NMAC (SA) Pty Ltd (representing the commercial Lake and Coorong fishers);
- Neville Jaensch, Mayor, Coorong District Council;
- Barry Featherston, Councilor, Alexandrina Council;
- Deana Mildren, member, SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Board;
- Craig Wilkins, Chief Executive, Conservation Council SA;
- Michael Garrod, Director Community Engagement, DEWNR;
- Mike Greig, Senior Ecologist Abundant Species, DEWNR;
- Renate Velzeboer, Ecologist Marine Interactions and Wildlife Biosecurity, DEWNR; and
- Lisa Bianchi, Administration Support, DEWNR.

SA Water and the South Australian Tourism Commission were an apology for the meeting.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT and COMMUNICATIONS**

- The community phone link-up with DEWNR has been temporarily discontinued due to the seasonally low LNFS numbers. The community phone link-up will be reinstated by late March to coincide with the potential increase in LNFS' in 2017.

Please contact Natural Resources SAMDB on 8532 9100 for your enquiry.

### **MONITORING THE ABUNDANCE AND MOVEMENT OF LNFS'**

- DEWNR and three community members conducted monitoring for the distribution and abundance of LNFS' in the northern lagoon of the Coorong on 15<sup>th</sup> November and 7<sup>th</sup> December 2016 and 17<sup>th</sup> January 2017 (See Figure 1). A total of 8, 12 and 10 LNFS' were counted on these days, respectively. The majority of LNFS' were seen at Goolwa and Tauwitchere barrages. These relatively low numbers reflect the seasonal fluctuation in LNFS numbers in coastal waters observed last year and elsewhere in the state, i.e. numbers peak during winter and then decline prior to the commencement of the breeding season in summer. The number of LNFS' in the Coorong is expected to increase over the coming months.
- DEWNR is looking for trends in the abundance and distribution of LNFS' in the northern lagoon of the Coorong throughout the year. Anyone is welcome to come along on a monitoring trip. Please register your interest by phoning 0429 487 814.



**Figure 1. Number of LNFS' in the northern lagoon of the Coorong**



- SARDI gave a presentation on the LNFS survey that was recently carried out in the Cape Gantheaume Wilderness Protection Area (WPA) on Kangaroo Island. This is the closest main breeding site for the species to the Coorong, the largest breeding site for the species, and the largest seal colony in Australia. A team of over 20 people worked over 6 days in the colony to estimate pup production using mark-recapture methods (See Figure 2). The pup production for the 2016/17 breeding season was estimated to be 4,825. The average pup production since 2010/11 breeding season has been 4,823. Numbers this year are on average to those estimated over the last seven years with pup production peaking in the 2013/14 breeding season (5,333 pups). Although there is still some increase in pup numbers at newly established sites within the colony, numbers at established sites have either declined or stabilised.



*Figure 2: Long-nosed fur seals pup with hair-cuts, applied as a temporary mark to aid mark-recapture estimation of pup production in the Cape Gantheaume Wilderness Protection Area, Kangaroo Island.*

Photo credit: Simon Goldsworthy (SARDI Aquatic Sciences)



- Around 98% of South Australia's LNFS pup production occurs at five sites, of which 48% off the lower Eyre Peninsula (North and South Neptune Islands and Liguanea Island) and 50% on Kangaroo Island (centred at Cape du Couedic and Cape Gantheaume). Pup production peaked at the lower Eyre Peninsula breeding sites in the mid-2000s, and the recent survey at Cape Gantheaume suggests that LNFS numbers have peaked and are stabilising on Kangaroo Island also.
- SARDI is planning to deploy up to seven satellite tags on LNFS' from the Coorong starting in May 2017 when the LNFS' have finished moulting, their numbers have increased and modifications have been made at Tauwitchere barrage to better trap the LNFS' at the vertical fish way.

## MANAGING SEAL-FISHER INTERACTIONS

- SARDI has developed a mobile phone App to monitor changes in the level and impacts of seal interactions with the commercial fishers, including the amount of fish catch that has been damaged. The App will allow assessments to be made on how these interactions vary in response to changing river flow and environmental conditions. This information will determine the effectiveness of mitigation options and strategies developed and implemented by the Long-nosed fur seal working group. The App has been trialed by one commercial fisher for a limited amount of time and requires further testing.
- The third set of trials with the power haul net that was planned for the end of 2016 was postponed due to the high flow of the River Murray. Flow levels have now reduced and the next trials to determine the suitability of this new method for the commercial Lakes and Coorong fishery are planned for March 2017.
- DEWNR informed that discussions were held with PIRSA, fishing industry and Safework SA on the legal and regulatory aspects of the underwater seal deterrents. Safework SA is considering a re-classification of the seal deterrent, which may facilitate easier storage and transport. DEWNR is working towards a single agency approach for the safe use of the deterrents in frightening seals. DEWNR has scheduled a further meeting with Safework SA and is planning to have the protocols finished by May 2017.

## 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 DEWNR website: [www.environment.sa.gov.au/seals](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/seals).
- The next meeting of the LNFS working group will be held on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2017.

