



New Zealand Sea Lion Trust

19 Irvine Road,
The Cove,
Dunedin,
New Zealand.
www.sealiontrust.org.nz

26/10/2007

Director-General of Conservation
Conservation House
PO Box 10-420
WELLINGTON.
Attention: Doug Nicol

SUBMISSION:
NEW ZEALAND SEA LION SPECIES MANAGEMENT PLAN 2007-2017

We support the development of this management plan. Its goals and management actions are vitally important to the future of an endemic marine mammal species.

We note that the New Zealand sea lion was classified as a threatened species on 31 July 1997 (under the Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978) and we support retention of this classification for the following reasons:

- 1) The restricted number of breeding sites;
- 2) The low population relative to the world's other sea lion species;
- 3) A declining trend in pup production at the main subantarctic breeding sites;
- 4) Ongoing vulnerability of the species to commercial fishing practices and epidemics;
- 5) The much reduced distribution after hunting by Maori and European sealers.

We make the following specific comments:

The New Zealand Sea Lion Trust advocates for human-induced sea lion mortality to be reduced to zero. We believe this to be a realistic goal but accept it cannot happen overnight. We therefore suggest that attempts be made to reduce it each year to allow research and technology time to develop techniques to achieve this goal.

Page 6-7 – Species biology and ecology

There are now 18 females (8 of breeding age) in Otago.

There is new age data in Simon Childerhouse's PhD thesis that has already been reported to DOC and should be reported here.

Page 9 – Agent(s) of decline and threats

Under *Tourism* and *Disturbance on the mainland*, we agree the potential exists for sea lions to be disturbed by human interactions and call for a substantial increase in public awareness efforts to ensure sea lion subpopulations are free to establish breeding sites wherever they chose.

Pages 12-13 – **Goal and Objectives**

The draft management plan envisages five distinct ‘sub-population’ groups – that is, two more than presently exist (Auckland Islands 2, Campbell Island 1) – and defines a sub-population as comprising at least 35 breeding females. While we are not convinced of the science used to calculate the number of breeding females required, we do consider it to be a useful starting point.

We support the research goal. We would like to see more effort invested in understanding the species’ biology, demography and ecology. In particular, the opportunity to monitor the establishment of new breeding colonies must be supported through research grants. Research work in the Auckland Islands and at Campbell Island must continue uninterrupted.

Page 15 – **Management – Survey**

Sea lion populations at Stewart Island and The Snares are poorly understood. We place high priority on efforts to gauge numbers and breeding there.

Page 17 – **Management - Threat management**

We call for the following management actions:

- 1) Step up monitoring of sea lion bycatch in subantarctic fisheries with 100% observer coverage.
- 2) Put more resources into the development and testing of mitigation practices in the fishing industry.
- 3) Establish more protected areas for subantarctic sea lions and for sea lions on the New Zealand mainland. In particular, we would like to see strategic mainland haul-out sites identified as no-go areas for motorised vehicles. We would also like to see temporary dog bans on mainland beaches frequented by pups.
- 4) Put in place clear response procedures in the event of the outbreak of epidemic disease, including measures to identify the disease and provide treatment.
- 5) Put in place clear and strong response procedures for when people cause deliberate harm to sea lions.

Page 18 – **Ex-situ/captive breeding**

We understand DOC has no wish to begin captive breeding of sea lions but we would like to see policy developed for dealing with orphaned pups and in-situ care. Veterinary care for sea lions is particularly limited in Otago.

Page 20 – **Stakeholders**

The New Zealand Sea Lion Trust is a charitable organisation, based in Dunedin, with limited funding. If DOC is seriously about running fair and equitable consultation, then funding should be available to interested stakeholder groups outside Wellington to cover travel to meetings. DOC could also consider running key sea lion meetings in Dunedin where there are large numbers of interested stakeholders. This would also spread the burden of travel costs between stakeholder groups based in Wellington and Dunedin.

Page 21 – **Community Relations – Planning**

We wholeheartedly support proactive education initiatives. These must emphasise the unique status of the New Zealand sea lion, and evoke a sense of wonder in a marine mammal that is an example of nature bouncing back in New Zealand.

Research – Population Dynamics

The phrase “. . . to encourage breeding on New Zealand mainland” (p 24) is used. DOC publicity must be careful not to oversell this, as it raises the ire of a number of media-savvy marine recreational users who regard sea lions as competition in fishing and highly dangerous to divers and surfboard riders. The important thing is to provide sea lions with breeding space without impediments.

This research section is related to the Population Management Plan, and we are making a separate submission on the PMP as well.

We advocate increased protective measures in the subantarctic zone, specifically the implementation of jigging-only fishing areas off the Auckland Islands utilised by foraging female sea lions. Please refer to our submission on the PMP for further details.

Funding

We expect the array of management, community relations and research initiatives set out in the NZ Sea Lion Species Management Plan will require a significant boost in funding, either through Vote Conservation or through sponsorship/co-sponsorship. We are concerned that the good intentions of the management plan will not be delivered – or be unduly delayed in their completion – because of a lack of funding.

We accept that the plan is at a draft stage and that none of the actions set out in the plan has been costed. Nonetheless, we would welcome a report on the financial implications of the finalised management plan going forward with recommendations about how these will be funded.

Measurable Outcomes

We support the goals and objectives of the Species Management Plan and most of the guidelines and management directives to achieve these goals. We would like to see more measurable outcomes with targets to be met and dates to achieve these targets by or the Plan is in danger of becoming an extensive wish-list with little accountability.

Thank you for considering these points.



Shaun McConkey
Chairman,
New Zealand Sea Lion Trust