

Fact sheet: true or false?

A LONG nosed fur seal fact sheet circulated recently by the Natural Resources SA Murray Darling Basin has been removed from State Government websites.

The fact sheet included information about why the name was changed from New Zealand fur seal to long nosed fur seal, whether it was normal for seals to be in the River Murray and whether the fish ate and attacked native birdlife.

Many fishers were angered when the fact sheet was circulating, stating there were many untruths. A Government spokesperson said it had been taken down in the interim.

"An early draft of the fact sheet was put on the website by mistake."

"Amended information is currently being finalised."

Ngarindjeri devastated by inaction

INACTION on the long nosed fur seals is angering the Ngarindjeri people, traditional land owners of the Coorong and Lower Lakes.

As the seal population increases, native birds and wildlife around the Coorong are reportedly being attacked and killed.

Ngarindjeri elder Darrell Sumner described the Coorong as "dead space with no birdlife since the long nosed fur seals had come to the region."

"They're killing birds and lots of fish - pelicans, swans, terns, musk ducks - I've not seen musk ducks in a long time," he said.

"We're angry because they're our totems, they're part of our ancestors who've passed on."

"What they're doing it hurts, it hurts spiritually it really does."

Mr Sumner said long nosed fur seals were destroying native wildlife in an area where the "predator" did not historically live and called on the State Government to take action.

"Action has to happen and no more talk; if it goes on for too much longer, the whole system will be gone," he said.

"The seals have got to go, they have to be culled," DEWNR (Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources) allows culling of kangaroos and other native animals.

According to Ngarindjeri records and history, long nosed fur seals did not live in the Coorong and Lower Lakes before European settlement.

"All the great uncles here always said there's never been seals in the Coorong or the river," he said.

"If they were in the Coorong then we'd find remains in the middens and there's not."

"From a Ngarindjeri perspective, we're quite clearly stated, we'd be willing to talk and be part of the discussion in regards to seals in the Coorong and lakes' riverine systems."

A Government spokesperson said they were unsure whether long nosed fur seals lived in the Coorong historically.

"The sealing industry reached its peak in the early 1800s, before European settlers arrived in South Australia, so it is difficult to know where and how seals lived at that time."



Fresh Kill: A pelican lays dead in Lake Alexandrina on Tuesday after it was attacked by a long nosed fur seal.

"Seal behaviour is opportunistic and suggests they would have gone into the Coorong when conditions surrounding food, salinity and water flow were right.

"The Lower Lakes and Coorong are now substantially different environments than before European settlement due to the creation of the barrages and changes in the River Murray's flow."

The spokesperson said the Government was serious about taking care of the Coorong and lakes.

"The South Australian Government takes the ongoing health of the Coorong and Lower Lakes very seriously and will continue to monitor multiple parameters of ecosystem health in the area," they said.

"DEWNR does not have concerns about the immediate impact of long-nosed fur seals on the ecosystem as a whole."

The spokesperson said they were working with industry to develop a statewide policy to guide the management of long nosed fur seals and discuss mitigation measures.

Fate sealed for Coorong, Lower Lakes fishers

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The Coorong Wild Seafood owners bought a second licence last year hoping to spend time away networking and promoting their products, leaving a registered master in charge.

But they could not find anyone willing to enter the bleak industry.

With limited property and assets to oneself, Mr and Mrs Hill fear they will be left with nothing after decades of hard work.

The South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) are undertaking an assessment of the impacts of seal populations on the seafood

industry, but many fishers believe by the time the document is released it will be too late.

The Standard contacted the Minister for Water and Environment Ian Hunter about the situation but he declined to comment.

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A Government spokesperson said they were working with the

Southern Fisherman's Association to investigate non-lethal management methods, including the use of small crakers to deter seals from nets in certain circumstances.

"All options, other than culling, put forward by industry are currently being considered by Government," the spokesperson said.

The Fisheries Management Act 2007 does not provide any delegation to waive regulated licence fees, however in exceptional circumstance an application for hardship can be made for fee relief.

"PIRSA Fisheries and Aquaculture and DEWNR representatives will continue to work with industry to discuss mitigation measures and investigate solutions that will secure the sustainability of this valuable fishery."

The spokesperson said the Lakes and Coorong was a unique fishery that contributed to the socio-economic wellbeing of the community and was one of only two South Australian fisheries to obtain independent sustainability accreditation from the Marine Stewardship Council.

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