

## Commercial Coorong fishers fear their fate may be sealed

COMMERCIAL fishers are under pressure as long-nosed fur seal numbers surge in the Lakes and Coorong fishery.

Presiding chairman of the Southern Fishermen's Association Garry Hera-Singh (pictured with a catch of Coorong mullet) said there were close to 30 fishing businesses "significantly affected" financially by the impact of the seals on their catch.

He said the seals had been using fishing nets as an easy source of food, ripping nets to take the fish and fishers were forced to constantly monitor for seal activity.

"Fishers have tried everything, even sleeping with the nets, but seals are so quick and agile," he said.

"It becomes uneconomical with not enough (net) soak time, particularly over winter months."

And seals often did not eat the fish they took, leaving unsalable broken fish carcasses.

"The seals can only eat so much, then they play," he said.

"They're like a fox in a chicken coop that kills 20 chickens and eats only one."

As seals were also ripping nets to get at the fish, gear replacement costs had trebled.

"Gos have gone through the roof," Mr Hera-Singh said. "I'm working an



extra 100 days and my income has halved. I see my family less."

Mr Hera-Singh said seals started to become an issue about seven years ago, but in the past two years had become even more problematic.

"They're supposed to go away in summer, to their breeding ground, but the past two summers, we've had a significant number stay," he said.

He said the fishers would like to receive some form of licence-fee subsidy, with many paying in excess of \$20,000 annually to be able to fish.

Marine mayhem MPs call for govt response

# Fur seals wreak havoc

By ELIZABETH ANDERSON

THE growing population of long-nosed fur seals in the Coorong and Murray Mouth has led to fishermen urging a cull of the marine mammals, which are decimating fish stocks and eating wildlife.

Local MP for Hammond Adrian Pedrick is calling on the state government to hurry up and develop a management plan for the species.

The population of long-nosed fur seals, formerly known as the New Zealand fur seal, is estimated by 5.5 per cent each year.

Mr Pedrick started a petition calling on the government to implement a management plan, which includes a "sustainable harvest" of the fur seal.

### Behind the headline

All increasing number of long-nosed fur seals have been spotted moving further upstream in the River Murray. In May and June seals were seen at Bletchley, irrigation channels at Narrung, Slurt Reserve in Murray Bridge and Mannum.

### Key points

- Fur seal population at 100,000
- Pyrotechnics considered
- Control options explored

He said he had received more than 400 signatures in support, with petition copies still circulating.

(The seals) need to be managed, because if something doesn't happen fisheries are certainly at risk," he said.

"People are having trouble paying their licence fees.

"The government is doing absolutely nothing."

Mr Pedrick said the seals were leaving fish chewed in half and nets wrecked, and were also attacking pelicans.

Mr Pedrick said he had put a

similar motion to parliament three years ago, without reference to a seal harvest.

"And still nothing has been done," he said.

"It is a sensitive issue but it's a hard task that needs to be taken."

Presiding chairman of the Southern Fishermen's Association, Garry Hera-Singh agrees there needs to be a plan, but is not sure a cull is the right answer unless replacing the removed animals.

He said fishery representatives had spoken to the Department of Environment, Water & Natural Resources and PIRSA to look at options to find a solution.

Mr Hera-Singh said fishery stakeholders came up with about eight or nine ideas to "provide some flexibility to fishers" at a meeting last week.

These include pyrotechnics to scare the seals away from boats, permission to use fishing gear

taken away in the 1980s and licence fee subsidies.

He said these were "one per center" ideas.

"Not one is going to fix the problem but collectively they'll buy us some time," Mr Hera-Singh said.

A state government spokesperson said the government was considering all options other than culling.

"DEWNR and PIRSA are working with the SFA to formulate a plan for managing seal-related issues in the Coorong," the spokesperson said.

DEWNR will continue to monitor multiple parameters of ecosystem health in the area.

A PIRSA spokesperson said the Fisheries Management Act 2007 did not provide any delegation to waive regulated licence fees, but in exceptional circumstances an application for hardship could be made for fee relief.



## Black hole in SA mobile funding, coverage

By CARLA WESSE-SMITH

SA WILL receive just 11 of the 499 new mobile phone base stations being constructed under the federal government's \$100 million Mobile Black Spot Program.

That compares with 144 in NSW, 130 in WA, 110 in Vic, 68 in Qld, 31 in Tas and five in the NT. The SA government's failure to contribute funding to the program is being blamed for the state's poor result.

"SA's failure to contribute to the mobile phone base stations fund will result in SA receiving just 2 per cent of the new phone towers to be constructed in Australia, despite making up 12.7pc of Australia's land mass," Stuart MP Dan van Holst Pellekaan said.

The federal funding was supplemented by commitments from other state governments - \$32m from WA, \$24m from NSW, \$21m from Vic, \$10m from Qld, and

\$350,000 from Tas, as well as about \$1.7m from local governments, businesses and community groups.

"The publicly available selection criterion makes clear those applications that have state government co-contributions would make the applications' business case stronger," Baker MP Tony Pasin said.

The government said successful locations were chosen following a competitive selection process in

which mobile network operators were asked to nominate sites where they would build new or upgraded base stations to serve black spot areas nominated by the public.

In a statement to *Stock Journal*, Public Sector Minister Susan Close said the prime responsibility for telecommunications sat with the federal government and with the commercial operators in that sector.

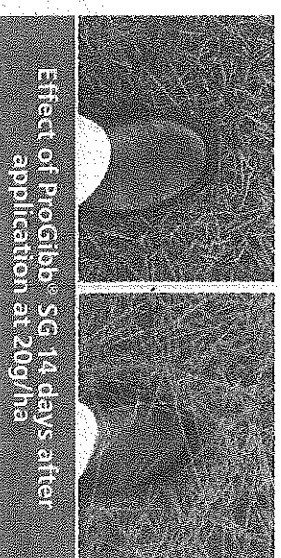
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