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South Australia

Fishermen want cull of New Zealand fur seals around the Coorong Lakes area

- by: *Investigations Editor Bryan Littlely*
- From: *adelaidenow*
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34 comments

- **VIDEO: Spectacular seal footage**



COORONG fishermen want seals commercially hunted to protect their livelihoods.

The Goolwa Pipi Harvesters Association has called for scientists to investigate the potential of commercial culling of New Zealand fur seals in South Australian waters, which would allow them to be hunted for their skins, oil and meat.

Fur seal numbers have exploded in the area, with an estimated 200 seals now in an established colony in the Coorong, with reports some have even moved into the lakes system.



VIDEO:

Coorong fishermen want to investigate commercially harvesting seals. Picture: Andrew Chapman
Source: Supplied

Spectacular seal footage (<http://video.adelaidenow.com.au/1149947910/Spectacular-Seal-footage%20>)

The fishermen, in a letter asking the South Australian Research and Development Institute to investigate the impact fur seals have on SA fisheries, say a seal cull is inevitable.

"If these populations continue to increase at the levels they have been, the impact on the broader ecosystem will be such that something will need to be done," Goolwa Pipi Harvest Association chair Roger Edwards said.

"We harvest other native species like kangaroos.

"If the species is not under threat and it is having an impact and there is a viable market, then why should it not be harvested?"

"An application has been made to research the impact of fur seals on the seafood industry and we are looking for the project to come up with a way to manage their numbers.

"We want them to explore the possibility of commercial management solutions ... harvesting them."

Goolwa Pipi Harvest Association members hold nine of the 36 fishing licences in the Lower Lakes and Coorong.

The Southern Fishermen's Association, which represents the remaining licence holders, has also supported SARDI's application to the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation for funding to study fur seal behaviour and their impact on SA fisheries.

"Throughout history, there is no evidence of any seals having been there in the Coorong," the Southern Fishermen's Association's Neil MacDonald said.

"Now, there is a well-established colony of fur seals there. They are a significant pest."

Mr MacDonald said his association did not have a stance on seal management practices but would like to have a

discussion about it.

He said strategies used in Tasmania included drugging and relocating seals and using explosive devices to scare them away.

The scope of the research, if funding is approved, would determine the impact seals have on recreational and commercial fish stocks. It also calls for scientists to put a dollar figure on what the seals cost SA fishing industries.

Coorong and Lower Lakes fishermen have complained the growing number of fur seals is affecting fish stocks and damaging nets.

"There are reports from fishermen that the seals quite often get into and pinch fish out of the nets, which obviously depletes the fishermen's catch but also can do damage to their equipment," Mr Edwards said.

"There also have been reports that they are eating penguins in the area."

Mr Edwards said it was widely accepted that New Zealand fur seal populations were growing.

"We only support the idea of commercial harvesting of fur seals on the basis that they have a sustainable population," he said.

A SARDI spokesperson said the research project proposal was still in its early stages of development and, if funded, would investigate the impact of fur seals on fisheries.

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