



# Friday update



## Captain's Blog

August 19, 2016

### Science–distorting myths about sea lions no help to their conservation



Sea lion pup and mother on Campbell Island. Photo: Kyle Morrison/NIWA.

Here are some inconvenient facts about endangered sea lions.

Inconvenient, that is, for those whose agenda is to close down Southern Ocean commercial fishing by any means.

NIWA fisheries scientist Dr Jim Roberts is so concerned by biased environmental and activist academic claims that he has spoken out.

He says recent public comments about the species are out of touch and are based on claims for which there is weak scientific evidence.

MPI and DOC have developed a threat

## In the Media



### Moana takes lead in restoring biodiversity at Bream Bay

Waatea News (August 15) reported on Maori owned fishing company Moana New Zealand taking the lead in restoring sand dunes in front of its commercial paua farm at Bream Bay.

Scientist Lynette Suvalko said the dunes play a huge role in maintaining coastal water quality, as well as protecting the land. While they are owned by the Crown and managed by the Department of Conservation, Moana also involved Northland Regional Council's environmental assets division and local iwi Patuharakeke in a plan for restoration and to improve biodiversity. This includes cultivating and planting native species and weeding out exotic species

management plan for sea lions and released a consultation paper for public comment, which closes today.

Despite the fact not one fishing-related sea lion death was recorded in this year's Auckland Island squid season (with near 100 percent observer coverage) and that the management plan identifies disease as a bigger threat than fishing, the usual naysayers – Forest & Bird, the Greens, Otago University academics – lined up against the industry.

Their contribution to a number of media articles “containing myths and misinformation”, according to Dr Roberts, “are counter-productive to the conservation of the species”.

He has studied sea lions population modelling, diet and reproductive biology for the past five years.

His research shows the claim sea lions mainly eat squid (and are therefore in direct competition with squid trawlers) is wrong.

Southern arrow squid make up less than one fifth of their diet. Survival and breeding rates of sea lions at the Auckland Islands were poor during a period of high squid abundance.

There is evidence of nutritional stress but the ultimate causes are not clear.

Sea Lion Exclusions Devices (SLEDs) were introduced to squid trawls a decade ago to allow escape from the nets. This has led to a major reduction in trawl mortality.

Opponents claim the sea lions are instead being killed by the SLEDs, labelled cryptic mortalities, and these are being ignored.

This, too, is untrue, according to Dr Roberts.

Modelling of collision with SLEDs suggests the risk of trauma or concussion is around three percent, according to the threat management plan.

Dr Roberts said even the most pessimistic SLED-related scenario does not explain the whole of the sea lion population decline.

“The Auckland Islands population has been dealing with something much bigger than trawl mortality and we urgently need to know what it is,” he says.

It is known that the bacterial disease *klebsiella pneumoniae*, first noticed killing sea lion pups in 1998, has since become endemic.

It is the main killer of pups during the summer field season, Dr Roberts says. “The duration of this endemic is unusual for a seal species and coincides with a protracted period of low pup survival.”

While the main Auckland Island population is in trouble, Stewart Island and the New Zealand mainland have been recolonised by sea lions in the past 20 years and the Campbell Island population, where a third of all pups are now born, is on the rise.

The myths, if not deliberate

to create an environment that is more hospitable for species such as the endangered fairy tern. [Read more](#)



One of the projects will develop a system to predict coastal water quality in Golden Bay and Tasman Bay. Photo: Marion van Dijk.

## Sustainable Seas Science Challenge research projects announced

**Stuff (August 17)** reported on Cawthron Institute and National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) scientists developing a system to predict coastal water quality, similar to a weather forecasting system.

The joint project is one of of eight scientific research projects that have received funding as part of the Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge announced by Science and Innovation Minister Steven Joyce this week. The project will be undertaken in Tasman Bay and Golden Bay. The water quality maps would show river plumes and accurate information about the risk of bacterial contamination from rivers following heavy rain events. The information would be useful for the commercial shellfish industry during harvesting and for local councils in regards to beach closures.

The Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge's innovation fund offers up to \$1.5 million a year to support research projects up to a value of \$150,000 per year for two years.

The projects aim to help Kiwis better understand and manage the oceans. The fund sought proposals that would not only contribute to the challenge meeting its objectives, but also to look at ways of adding value to the marine economy. Challenge director Dr Julie Hall said she was not only delighted with the standard and scope of the proposals submitted, but also the highly original thinking.

[Click this link](#) for the full list of research projects

[Click this link](#) for more on the coastal water quality project.

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misinformation, that Dr Roberts has been moved to tackle are harmful in his view “because they distort the science and may divert resources into ineffective conservation measures.

“Misinformation is a genuine threat to the conservation of New Zealand sea lions.”

– Tim Pankhurst

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**Seafood Industry Conference**  
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August 24!



**NEW ZEALAND SEAFOOD INDUSTRY CONFERENCE**  
31<sup>st</sup> AUGUST, 2016 | TE PAPA, WELLINGTON

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### Seafood Stars Awards Finalists

Thirteen of the industry's star achievers are in the running to be presented with the inaugural Seafood Stars Awards at the New Zealand Seafood Industry Conference this year. The awards are a great way to reward innovation and excellence within our dynamic industry and tell stories about our premium seafood, our people and our ongoing commitment to sustainability. It is especially fitting that we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Quota Management System by rewarding industry's achievements.

The final nominees selected across the three award categories are:

**Longstanding Service Award**



Timaru commercial fisher Gordon Mitchell.

Photo: Jim Bisset/Fairfax.

### Mataitai reserve amended after commercial fishers' concerns

Stuff (August 17) reported on commercial fishers being pleased with the changes made to the original proposal for a mataitai reserve south of Timaru. Commercial fisherman Gordon Mitchell said he had been fishing in the area for 53 years and the original plans for the second coastal reserve site would have encroached on fishing territory. Commercial fisheries caught fish outside the one nautical mile boundary from within the shore, catching "high value" fish, such as gurnard and flounder, he said. The reserve initially covered 5 sq km, from about 500m north of Scarborough to Lagoon Drive, and offshore about 2km. It now extends out 1.4 kilometres from the shoreline. The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) granted mataitai reserve status to the coastal site south of Timaru, known as the Tuhawaiki Mataitai Reserve, late last month. [Read more](#)

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1. **Doug Saunders-Loder** – NZ Federation of Commercial Fishermen
2. **Rob Pooley** – Marine Farming Association
3. **Phillip Clow** – Whitianga/Coromandel Peninsula Commercial Fishermen's Association
4. **Donna Wells** – Finestkind Ltd

#### Seafood Innovations – Sustainability Award

1. **Richard Wells** – Resource Wise
2. **Brian Kiddie** – Bay of Plenty Fishermen's Association
3. **Dr David Middleton** – Trident Systems
4. **Scott Murray** – Mt Cook Alpine Salmon
5. **Dave Kellian** – Leigh Commercial Fishermen's Association

#### Young Achiever Award

1. **Adam Clow** – Southern Cross Fishing
2. **Oliver Wilson** – Trident Systems
3. **Tom Searle** – Leigh Fisheries
4. **Te Tane Trinick** – Mt Cook Alpine Salmon

Award winners will be announced during the ANZ Cocktail Function at the New Zealand Seafood Industry Conference on Wednesday, August 31 at The Boat Shed, Taranaki Street Wharf, Wellington.




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