



Friday update



Captain's Blog

November 3, 2017

Otago University sea lion study slammed by experts

Poor science deserves to be challenged and three sea lion scientists have done just that.

A study led by Dr Stefan Meyer from the University of Otago's Anti-Commercial Fishing Department (not an official title) claimed to have "game-changing" evidence that allegedly showed commercial squid fishing posed a direct and major threat to the endangered New Zealand sea lion.

That was too much for a group of independent scientists - Dr Jim Roberts from the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, Dr Simon Childerhouse from Blue Planet Marine and Prof Wendi Rose from Massey University - who have worked closely with sea lions and were moved to vigorously debunk the study published in the international journal PNAS and reported in the New Zealand Herald.

They were concerned such articles misinformed the public and policy makers about the cause of the sea lions' decline, with potentially damaging consequences for their conservation.

The current population is estimated at being just under 12,000. The Auckland islands, 460km south of Bluff, are the main breeding ground.

Last summer the annual Department of Conservation survey recorded a healthy increase in pup numbers - up 14 percent on the previous year from 1727 to 1965 pups.

In the Media

Radio NZ fined over unfairness

Radio NZ has been ordered to pay \$2000 and broadcast a statement acknowledging it treated a seafood industry-related company unfairly.

The Broadcasting Standards Authority made its ruling after RNZ's *Insight* failed to give Trident Systems the opportunity to respond to comments made by Greenpeace NZ executive director Russel Norman.

The programme aired on March 13. The BSA said RNZ failed to meet its obligations under the fairness standard when it did not offer Trident the right of reply.

"There was a risk of reputational harm for Trident and more care was needed to be taken," it said.

"While Trident did provide comment on other aspects of the broadcast, it was not given the opportunity to refute this particular allegation or provide further, more informed, context to [the interviewee's] comments."

RNZ was ordered to broadcast and publish online a comprehensive summary of the decision and pay \$2000 towards Trident's legal costs.

Trident, a fisheries science and research company, lodged the complaint after Norman was questioned about a 2012 camera monitoring trial run by MPI in the Timaru set net fishery and undertaken by Trident and another research company, Archipelago.

The Archipelago study involved six fishing vessels and 162 catch events, while the Trident technology trial involved video equipment on three vessels and 27 catch events.

The pup counts appear to have stabilised between 1600 to 1700 pups per year since 2009, according to DoC and the Ministry for Primary Industries' threat management plan 2017–22.

MPI's 2016 Aquatic Environment and Biodiversity Annual review recognised "there is no single threat that is impacting on the sea lion population and recovery will require mitigation of multiple threats at the four main breeding sites."

Despite that, Meyer and co-author Associate Prof Bruce Robertson, also of Otago, claimed management of sea lion bycatch in the arrow squid fishery placed the population at risk of extinction and that the sea lion exclusion devices that allow the animals to escape from nets may be hiding deaths and injuries.

MPI emerged from its bunker to make the vague response that it was completing a technical review of the paper and could not comment on its conclusions.

Dearie me. It already has the evidence in its own threat management plan.

However, the three expert sea lion scientists were more forthright, saying the Otago study was deeply flawed and they were mystified as to how it had passed a peer review process.

"Even for the most pessimistic fisheries scenario where all sea lion interactions with commercial trawls resulted in death, fisheries-related mortality was not nearly sufficient to explain the 50 percent decline in the number of breeders," scientists Roberts, Childerhouse and Rose said.

"Full investigations into the causes of pup deaths have been conducted since 2006.

"A total of 438 dead pups have been assessed, of which 55 percent were diagnosed to have died as a direct result of infection by the bacterium *Klebsiella pneumoniae*.

"The next most common cause of death was trauma or drowning in mud holes, killing 21 percent of pups."

Why did Meyer et al dismiss these other threats?, they asked.

Why indeed?

Maybe because they did not fit with preconceived notions. If the truth is inconvenient, best to ignore it.

Will it be to the advantage of New Zealand sea lion conservation to dismiss threats other than fishing as unimportant, despite the weight of evidence to the contrary?, Roberts and his colleagues further asked.

"We don't think so," they answered.

"Good progress is being made to understand the root causes of the catastrophic decline at the Auckland islands, including the roles of disease, nutrition and fisheries. But we still haven't resolved the best management

During the study, Archipelago reported the death of a single dolphin. Trident reported no dolphin deaths in its technology trial because none were observed.

During a subsequent study in 2014, focused on the Snapper 1 trawl fishery, MPI contracted both Archipelago and Trident to undertake video observation. In its report, the BSA was critical of Norman's comments and said although he is entitled to an opinion, his remarks amounted to "conjecture", whilst he also "conflated" a report on the 2012 trial. In the interview, Norman said Trident "found nothing", while Archipelago found "lots of illegal behaviour".

He then implied that MPI had awarded the subsequent contract to Trident because of these results.

"MPI's next step was to award the contracts for videos in Snapper 1 to Trident, obviously because Trident passed the test, they found nothing and that's what MPI wanted," Norman claimed. A complaint regarding accuracy was not upheld because the standard applies only to statements of fact and Norman's remarks amounted to "analysis, comment or opinion".

[Read the BSA's ruling](#)

New mussel assets boost for Kono

Kono, the Maori-owned food and drinks company, has acquired Ngai Tahu Seafood's greenshell mussel assets. The assets include two purpose-built marine farming vessels and associated aquaculture equipment, the right to lease 15 marine farms in Marlborough Sounds, Tasman Bay, Golden Bay and Collingwood, as well as access to spat-catching areas. "Our mussel growing and processing business is strong," Rachel Taulelei, Kono CEO says. "The purchase and lease of additional marine farming assets from Ngai Tahu provides us with increased certainty of supply, which means we have an even better foundation from which to plan for future growth."

[Read more](#)

New Zealand King Salmon shares rose to a record high after the Nelson-based business raised its 2018 earnings guidance. A strong first quarter saw the company lift their forecasted earnings to be between \$24.5m and \$26.0m, up from \$22.4m. The increase was on the back of improving production, lower feed prices and higher sales volumes. The stock has risen 78 percent in 2017 to \$2.35.

options for reversing the downward trend.
"It is essential that simplification and misinformation are not allowed to confuse our collective efforts to understand and conserve New Zealand's own sea lion."



No sign of bonamia in wild oysters

The latest testing of the Bluff wild oyster fishery shows no sign of bonamia ostreae, says the Ministry for Primary Industries.

The testing was part of MPI's surveillance programme for the invasive parasite said MPI Director of Readiness and Response Geoff Gwyn.

"This is great news for the local industry and everyone involved in the response," he said.

"The results suggest the removal of farmed oysters from Big Glory Bay and Marlborough was the right thing to do in terms of reducing risk of the parasite spreading to the wild oyster populations."

Bonamia ostreae was discovered in Stewart Island waters in May, resulting in MPI's decision to remove all farmed flat oysters in Big Glory Bay and Marlborough to prevent further spread.

[Read more](#)

Salmon farming at Port Pegasus, Stewart Island, has been given the no-go. A feasibility study by the Southland Regional Development Strategy found low water flow at the site would cause economic uncertainty and major challenges for any farms. SoRDS new industries team leader Mark O'Connor told *Southland Times* it was disappointing the economic opportunity wasn't there.

The National Party's election candidate for Napier, David Elliot, says he expects there is now nothing to stop new Fisheries Minister Stuart Nash from introducing a ban on commercial fishing at a depth of less than 50m. In the editorial for *Hawkes Bay Today* Elliot welcomes that Nash has "the opportunity to quickly enforce the rejuvenation of our declining fish stocks." He also states there should be increased maritime surveillance to stop foreign vessels "from illegally pillaging our fisheries with impunity."

[Read Seafood New Zealand's latest magazine here](#)

