

Haig, Alan

From: Byrne, Matt (DPIPWE)
Sent: Wednesday, 21 November 2018 1:02 PM
To: Thalmann, Sam (DPIPWE); Alderman, Rachael (DPIPWE); Goodsir, Ben (DPIPWE); Wilson, Louise (DPIPWE); Bond, Luke (DPIPWE)
Cc: Monash, Ross (DPIPWE); Febey, Justin (DPIPWE); Carlyon, Kris (DPIPWE)
Subject: RE: Seal deterrents options/use and training

As discussed Sam, I am keen to log a list of thoughts and issues to serve as a basis for the Marine Section (and in particular the new Wildlife Officer) to identify priority areas for further internal discussion. I will capture your feedback here.

Cheers,

Matt.

From: Thalmann, Sam (DPIPWE)
Sent: Wednesday, 21 November 2018 11:17 AM
To: Alderman, Rachael (DPIPWE) <Rachael.Alderman@dpipwe.tas.gov.au>; Goodsir, Ben (DPIPWE) <Ben.Goodsir@dpipwe.tas.gov.au>; Wilson, Louise (DPIPWE) <Louise.Wilson@dpipwe.tas.gov.au>; Bond, Luke (DPIPWE) <Luke.Bond@dpipwe.tas.gov.au>
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Subject: Seal deterrents options/use and training

I welcomed the opportunity to observe the departments seal deterrent training package at Tassal, Nubeena on 16th November.

Justin Febey delivered the package and covered off on all of the package components including seal behaviour, SMF, permits and regulatory conditions and specific deterrent devices. While it was well delivered, the training package and delivery is clearly constrained by the available resources and the low priority placed on training and industry compliance by DPIPWE management.

Due to such constraints the training package did not contain/outline:

- Practical demonstration, guidance in the use of deterrent devices.
- Details on negative animal welfare impacts to seals if used outside of, or indeed if used according to permit conditions.
- Specific obligation of user liability within Animal Welfare Act.

However, while measures are being sought to address the loss of resources to manage training/compliance/development of an external training package, I believe that following recent independent investigations the department is obliged to review if current deterrents are actually fit for purpose, suitably audited and monitored adequately through current compliance resourcing.

As part of a collaboration between IMAS, INDUSTRY and DPIPWE, necropsy investigations into the cause of death has been performed for 12 seals found on aquaculture leaseholds throughout 2018. Preliminary results show that of this number 2 had penetrating wounds involving Scare-Cap darts (Industry also independently reported another seal with a penetrating Scare-Cap dart) and a further 4 showed evidence of blunt force trauma leading to internal bleeding and drowning.

Necropsies could only be performed on 12 of the seals retrieved (with 50% of these showing blunt force trauma contributing to their death as described above), with a total of 34 dead seal reports from industry thus far in 2018. As such these findings are likely a large underestimate of the proportion of seals that die due to approved and legislated deterrent use. This is also likely a large underestimate as many seals with injury/penetrating wounds resulting from deterrents would leave the area and die outside of the lease area. I can personally testify that this appears to be the case as having performed recent survey work around seal haul-outs adjacent to marine farming zones I have noted a proportion of injured and debilitated seals in significantly higher densities than would be expected to occur at a wild haul-out.

I believe that this situation has risen due to a lack of oversight from the department. In particular:

- Scare-Cap firearms have multiple power settings and may be user defined. Investigations have shown that this allows the user to fire a Scare-Cap with penetrating power. These devices are currently approved by the department with minimal, to no, compliance around their use. This has, and continues to lead to multiple breaches of the Animal Welfare Act.
- Preliminary investigations into "unexplained" aquaculture seal deaths show significant levels of internal trauma diagnosed as contributory to many of these deaths. This is the first time that such detailed investigations have been conducted. Results from these necropsies should alert DPIWE management that current deterrent options and deterrent use are likely contravening the Animal Welfare Act on a significant scale. Such a risk to the agency should lead to decisive and positive actions.

I believe that the necropsy findings in association with high level of deterrent use should lead the department to implement the following actions:

- The use of Scare-Cap devices from firearms with multiple power setting should be banned. These devices should only be available following thorough determination of maximum power outputs that result in adherence to animal welfare principals and the subsequent regulation and compliance of these limitations.
- Further investigations determining what tissue damage may be resulting from current impact deterrents (Scare-Caps and Bean Bags) should be considered as it is likely that highly motivated seals will withstand significant tissue damage leading to compromises of Animal Welfare without immediate behavioural modification at the time of deterrent deployment. Given the current statistics around deterrent use this is likely happening on a significant scale.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and provide greater detail as requested.

Regards

Sam

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