

# MANAGEMENT OF SEALS ONSHORE IN TASMANIA

- » **Observe**
- » **Isolate**
- » **Let rest**



## QUICK GUIDE TO CONTENTS

SEAL ONSHORE – INFORMATION TO REPORT:	3
SEAL IDENTIFICATION	4
SEAL AGE-CLASS	5
SEAL BODY CONDITION	6
SEAL INJURIES	7
SEAL LOCATION	8
ENTANGLED SEALS	8

Please ring DPIPWE Wildlife Management Branch **0427 942 537** for further advice

## YOUR FIRST RESPONSE IS TO:

- » **Observe**
- » **Isolate**
- » **Let rest**

Seals are marine mammals, however unlike whales and dolphins they do not need immediate action or assistance if they are onshore. They do not require to be kept cool and wet as do stranded whales and dolphins. Species such as leopard and elephant seals can be comfortable around people and are almost always just onshore to rest, however fur seals and sea lions that are hauled out in public places are sometimes in poor condition.

The most appropriate management for seals is simply to isolate them from people and leave them undisturbed to rest. This can also be important to ensure public safety. The information proposed below, can then be collected, starting with the species identification as this will usually give the first clue as to the likely predicament of the animal.

If a seal is found on a beach, please undertake these two steps before any other action is taken:

- 1 Observe the seal and note the important information to report below;
- 2 Ring DPIPWE Wildlife Management Branch on the 24-hour hotline number **0427 942 537** for further advice

## ACTION FLOW CHART

- 1** **Locate**
- 2** **Observe and Record -**  
from 10m or more, see datasheet
- 3** **Ring Hotline - 0427 942 537**  
If in public area such as car park, road, built up area move to step 6
- 4** **Isolate**  
Fencing and signage
- 5** **Let Rest**  
Most seals are ashore to rest and leave on next tide
- 6** **Intervention**  
Only for welfare reasons or public safety

## SEAL ONSHORE – INFORMATION TO REPORT:

### PLEASE FILL IN THE FORM BELOW

The following information will be vital to staff when evaluating the seal onshore situation.

Please circle the appropriate answers and fill in the relevant information to assist DPIPWE staff providing advice to you onsite.

Species	Fur seal	Elephant Seal	Leopard Seal	Unknown
Location description	<i>Example: South end of beach, near rocky cape</i> .....			
Age	Pup	Yearling	Juvenile	Adult
Body condition	Very Skinny (Ribs, pelvis, vertebrae visible)	Skinny (Ribs visible)	Good	Fat (Rolls of fat around neck)
Injuries description	Location on body	Size	Fresh (Weeping, bleeding)	Healing (Lack of seepage but muscle visible)
Entanglement type of material	Net	Rope	Other - please detail .....	
Entanglement location on body	Lower body	Upper body	Other - please detail .....	
Entanglement amount	Length .....		Number of net squares .....	
Behaviour	Sleeping	Sitting Up	Lying down, unable to rise	Aggressive
Photographic evidence	<b>Instructions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Photos should be taken of both sides of the seal's body.</li> <li>• Take photos of wounds/scarring or unusual markings.</li> <li>• Take a photo of the individual indicating its size and showing the location of any wounds.</li> </ul>		 <p style="text-align: right;">EXAMPLE</p>	

## SEAL IDENTIFICATION

It is important to correctly identify and **report to Wildlife Management Branch staff** exactly which species has been observed. A photograph is the best way to assist identification. Identifying seals is tricky but the following features will assist.

TYPES OF SEALS		
	Eared Seals (Otariid)	Earless Seals (Phocid)
Examples	All fur seals and sealions	Leopard and elephant seals
Easy identification feature	Presence of external 'ears' – similar to a small dog	No external 'ears' obvious
Mode of locomotion	Appear to "walk" and climb (can rotate their hind flippers under the body)	Appear to "hump" along like a caterpillar (unable to rotate their hind flippers under the body). If "dragging" its rear flippers, this is normal locomotion.
Visual examples	 <p>FEMALE AUSTRALIAN FUR SEAL</p>	 <p>JUVENILE ELEPHANT SEAL</p>
	 <p>MALE AUSTRALIAN FUR SEAL</p>	 <p>LEOPARD SEAL</p>
	 <p>FEMALE AUSTRALIAN SEALION</p>	 <p>FEMALE ELEPHANT SEAL</p>
	 <p>MALE AUSTRALIAN SEALION</p>	 <p>LEOPARD SEAL</p>

## SEAL AGE-CLASS

The most important distinction of seal age-class to determine and report is between a pup, juvenile and adult seal.

### Pups

Eared seal pups will typically be Australian and New Zealand fur seals, which are 60-70 cm in length (weight of up to 10 kg) and black in colour. Eared seal pups are dependent on their mothers for approximately 9 to 12 months.

Earless seal pups in Tasmania will typically be Southern elephant seals, which are approximately 130 cm in length (weight of 40-50kg) and black in colour. Southern elephant seal pups are normally sighted in late September or early October and are dependent on their mothers for less than a month. Once weaned, the pup will then be left alone on the beach for 2-3 months before it heads to sea.

Very importantly, if a pup is found alone, or with its mother, call the **Wildlife Management Branch** IMMEDIATELY. Do not go near the seal(s) but try to cordon off the area to the public at an appropriate distance from the seals (ideally at least 200m). If a mother is with the pup, any disturbance may result in the pup being abandoned.



ELEPHANT SEAL WITH PUP



JUVENILE FUR SEAL

### Juveniles

Juveniles and adults are most likely to be Australian or New Zealand fur seals, Southern elephant seals or leopard seals.

- » Eared seal juveniles are 1.0-1.5 m length, and brown in colour.
- » Earless seal juveniles are 1.5-3.0 m in length, and brown/ grey in colour.

### Adults

- » Eared and earless seal adults are large animals ranging from 1.5-5.0 m in length (weight of 50-4000 kg depending on species).



Juveniles can be distinguished from pups by their brown/ grey colour and pointed nose.

## SEAL BODY CONDITION

Seal body condition can be easily reported as **good/normal** body condition, or **emaciated**. It is also important to note if the seal is **moulting**.

### Good/Normal Condition Seals

A seal in good body condition will probably be quite active, and have no obvious outline of bones evident through the fur. **Importantly, there is no pressing need to intervene as the animal is likely to be simply resting.** However, if the seal is in a public place they may need to have a barrier erected around them (if not already constructed), or be moved away by Biodiversity Conservation Branch staff, as they are vulnerable to abuse.

### Emaciated Seals

Often older male Australian fur seals. They typically occur in late summer following the breeding season. These animals may die of old age. **Importantly, there is no pressing need to intervene, as it is probably a natural cause.** However, if they are in a public place they may need to be moved, as they are vulnerable to abuse.



ADULT MALE NEW ZEALAND FUR SEAL IN GOOD CONDITION



AUSTRALIAN FUR SEAL EMACIATED

### Moulting Seals

Elephant seals have a dramatic moult and need to haul out for between a month to six weeks when this occurs. When hauled out they tend to be fairly complacent around people. During a moult they lose all their fur and then a new coat grows. For this reason they can be reported as sick and distressed. They typically do not feed during this period therefore they will lose weight. Similarly it is normal for them to have an extensive amount of nasal discharge, which is exaggerated by the fact that they do not enter the water during this period and hence the discharge does not wash away.

**Importantly, there is no immediate need to intervene, as moulting is a natural event.**

If moulting seals are in a public place they can be vulnerable to abuse. As such, they may need to have a barrier erected around them or be moved away by **Wildlife Management Branch staff.**



Moulting elephant seal with exclusion fence

## SEAL INJURIES

It is important to report if the seal appears injured.

Seals that are injured have excellent recuperation abilities, and typically **do not** require further intervention - **apart from erecting a barrier to prevent public access and regular monitoring.**

### Large Bite Wounds

A bite or flesh-wound on an otherwise healthy seal in a colony, or an isolated area, does not require any intervention and the wound will heal quickly. However, action is required if the seal is wounded in an urban area (as in the right picture).



NEW ZEALAND FUR SEAL

### Pseudo-wounds

Female seals have a mammary gland above the left rear flipper. These have been previously mistaken for a wound. In addition, marine mammals continuously secrete tears to lubricate the eyes, which can also look like a wound as illustrated in this picture (right).



AUSTRALIAN FUR SEAL

### Eye Injuries

Seals feed at depths in low light or at night and have well-developed whiskers to find their prey. Therefore eye injuries do not mean that a seal will not be able to feed. **Healthy blind seals have been observed in the wild.**

**Observations of eye injuries should consider whether the injury is fresh or healing, and note the body condition of the animal.**

Elephant seals have large prominent eyes that are often red around the iris. This can be confusing to those who have not seen them before and this is often reported as a problem when in fact it is perfectly natural. The combination of discharge from the nose and red eyes is actually common for a perfectly healthy elephant seal.



AUSTRALIAN FUR SEAL



ELEPHANT SEAL

## SEAL LOCATION

Seals are commonly found on beaches or rocky coasts, however sometimes seals will be found in atypical locations. **It is often useful to report where the animal is found to Wildlife Management Branch staff, particularly if on roads.** If found in an unusual location, the seal may need to be relocated by Biodiversity Conservation Branch staff to a coastal region away from the public, particularly if they are interacting with recreational fisheries.

ADULT MALE AUSTRALIAN FUR SEAL



**Capturing, restraining and moving seals requires specialised equipment and experienced staff, therefore it is important that Wildlife Management Branch staff are involved.**

## ENTANGLED SEALS

Entangled seals require immediate intervention if possible. It is very important to report if the seal is entangled and the type of entanglement (if known). This will allow **Wildlife Management Branch staff** to be adequately prepared when attending to the seal. Try to record the following information:

- » Species
- » Age
- » Location
- » The type of entanglement material (e.g. netting, rope, bait strap, rubber ring, monofilament gill net, etc).
- » The amount of entanglement material (e.g. how far it drapes down the animal's body (just around neck, down to shoulders, past flippers, towards rear, longer than the animal, etc).
- » Whether the entanglement material is deeply embedded in the neck or loose.

**Capturing, restraining and removing entanglements from these seals requires specialised equipment and experienced staff, therefore it is important that Wildlife Management Branch staff are involved.**

JUVENILE AUSTRALIAN FUR SEALS

