

19 February 2014

Hon Dr Nick Smith & Hon Mr Nathan Guy  
Minister of Conservation & Minister for Primary Industries  
Parliament Building  
WELLINGTON

Dear Hon Dr Nick Smith and Hon Mr Nathan Guy

### **Need for Intervention to Conserve New Zealand Sea Lions at Auckland Islands**

Deepwater Group Ltd is concerned with the decline in the New Zealand sea lion population at Auckland Islands. This population increased by ~10% during 1990-1998 but has since declined by ~25%.

It is now evident that this decline will continue even if there were no further deaths due to fishing.

We seek your urgent consideration of the real causes for this decline and ask that the Government take immediate remedial action to reverse this.

#### **Decline Driven by Disease or by Fishing?**

- Sea lion pup production on the Auckland Islands has been studied over the past two decades (funded and supported by the Seafood Industry).
- Pup production has declined from a peak of 3021 (1998) to 1575 (provisional 2014 result). This is the driver for the decline in the size of this population.
- This decline is of concern to all – including Seafood Industry – and, as New Zealanders, we all must do all that we can to reverse it.
- The cause of this decline has been attributed to incidental deaths from fishing.
- Industry has spent millions of dollars on research, assessments, monitoring, and the development and deployment of SLEDs to reduce incidental deaths from fishing.
- There can be only one objective: Increase the population size.
- The Seafood Industry's aim: Reduce the incidental deaths from fishing to zero.
- Annual numbers of sea lion deaths in fisheries around the Auckland Islands have steadily declined from ~100 (in 1990), to ~60 (in 2002) and now ~10 (in 2012) (estimates are from MPI, scaled up from observed captures).
- During the 1990s this population is estimated to have increased in size, at a time when fishing is estimated to have been killing ~100/year.
- The population decline has occurred during a period of low (and reducing) fishing deaths.
- It is now clear that the impacts of disease on this population during the last decade (both chronic and acute) are a critical factor in this decline.
- For those pups born in the years 1990 to 1993, on average, ~50% died before reaching 2 years of age due to natural causes.

- For those pups born in the years 2005 to 2010, on average ~80% died before reaching 2 years of age.
- Results from emerging research indicate that ~30% of the pups born between 2005 and 2010 died due to disease (or possibly more than 30%).
- *Klebsiella pneumonia* appears to be the most probable cause of these deaths.
- This disease was first evident in the Auckland Islands around 2001.
- For those pups born in the years 2005 to 2010, on average ~600 died each year before reaching 2 years of age.
- By comparison fishing killed on average 15 adults each year during that period.
- This population would still continue to decline due to the high number of pup deaths from disease, even if there were no further deaths due to fishing.
- This is a national conservation issue.


#### **A National Conservation Issue – Requires Immediate Action**

Quota owners urge immediate Government action to fully investigate the adverse effects of disease on the survivability of sea lion pups at Auckland Islands and to determine what interventions are available to prevent disease continuing to reduce this 'Nationally Critical' marine mammal population.

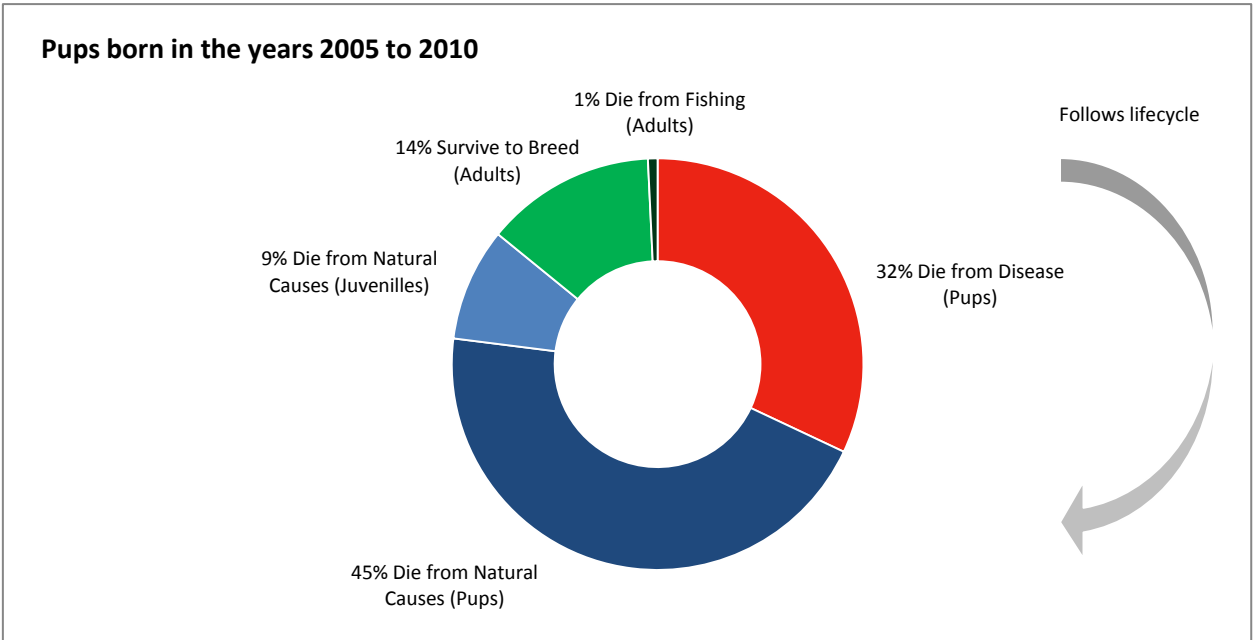
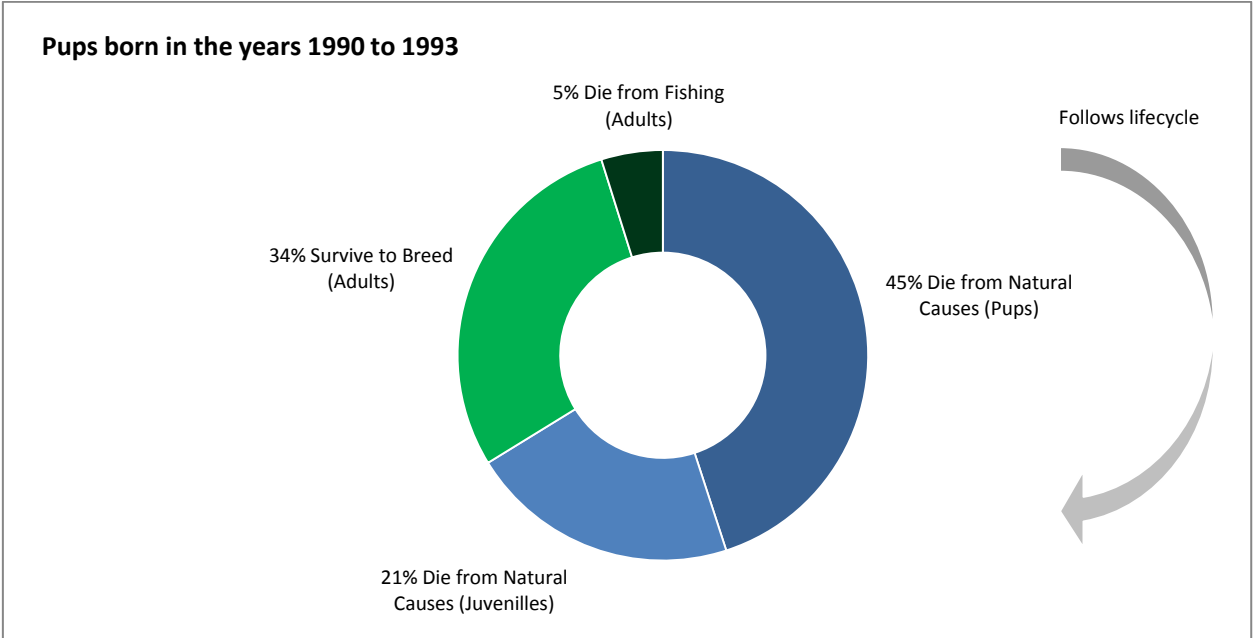
Industry offers to host a workshop of experts in marine mammal biology, veterinary science, epidemiology and animal husbandry to provide you with advice on how intervention could be applied to reduce the depredation of disease in these sea lions.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these concerns and to provide further supporting information should you require.

Kind regards



George Clement  
CEO



Notes:

1. In the above figures 'Pups' are -0-2 years, 'Juveniles' are 2-5 years and 'Adults' are 5+ years.
2. Only 34% and 14% of the pups become adults (i.e. 'Survive to Breed').
3. Of these adults, some die from fishing. The 5% and 1% estimates of sea lions that 'Die from Fishing' are expressed as proportions of the numbers of pups born, not as proportions of the numbers of adults (hence the numbers in the figures exceed 100%).