

# Industry volunteers to help declining sea lion populations



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New Zealand sea lion.

**The squid fishing industry has voluntarily agreed to constrain fishing activity to reduce sea lion fishing related mortality, after research results showed a decline in the numbers of sea lion pups.**

In January this year the Department of Conservation (DOC) released provisional results from the latest sea lion pup count, showing a 30 percent decline in sea lion pups and a decline in the number of female sea lions coming ashore.

With the 2009 squid fishery having started on 1 February the Minister of Fisheries, Hon Phil Heatley, asked the squid fishing industry to voluntarily reduce fishing activity to ensure that the latest pup numbers would be reflected in the sea lion Fishing Related Mortality Limit (FRML).

In late January the squid fishing industry announced that they agreed to constrain their fishing activities and effectively reduce the sea lion FRML from 113 animals to 95. This brought the FRML down to what it would have been had the latest pup count been available earlier.

The sea lion FRML is an annual decision made by the Minister based on a scientific model developed specifically for the New Zealand sea lion population. A major component of the information the Minister considers is the sea lion pup count,

undertaken every year by DOC. In December last year the Minister set the FRML for the 2009 squid fishing season at 113 sea lions.

Deepwater fisheries manager, Aoife Martin, says that while the sea lion FRML would have still been sustainable it was necessary to take the latest information into account.

"It was excellent to see the squid industry taking such fast and responsible action when the latest pup count came to light, they need to be congratulated," Aoife said.

The squid fishery around the sub-Antarctic Auckland and Campbell Islands operates between February and May, or until the FRML is reached. This is the number of sea lions that can be caught by squid fishing vessels without significant effect on the population in any year. The fishery is closed when MFish estimates the FRML has been reached based on the total number of trawls by the fishing vessels in the fishery.

MFish is continuing to work closely with industry to manage the interactions between the squid fishing fleet and sea lions.