

Press Release
14 August 2009

Seal Pup Strandings

With the Cape Fur seal pupping season less than four months away, conservation officials and animal welfare groups met yesterday to review their individual and collective ideas on how to manage live strandings of new born, seal pups.

Each year between November and February, numerous new born seal pups wash up on Cape Town's beaches. Most of these are drowned when they wash up and have to be disposed of by the City's Waste Management Department. However, some proportion of them come ashore alive. When found, such animals are mostly in a dehydrated, exhausted condition, and until now, have been routinely euthanized. The most recent (2008/09) pupping season saw an extraordinary number of seal pup strandings in the False Bay area, presenting a huge challenge to managers.

In preparation for this year's seasonal strandings, the Cape of Good Hope (CoGH) SPCA convened a workshop of concerned and interested parties, including Marine and Coastal Management, the NSRI, SANPARKS, Two Oceans Aquarium, Save our Seas Foundation/Shark Centre and CTM Law Enforcement. The aim of the workshop was review the current management response to live strandings of seal pups in the False Bay area, and to determine if and how a more pro-active response could be implemented in future, including efforts at rescue, rehabilitation and release of pups, .

According to Allan Perrins CEO at the CoGH SPCA "This inaugural meeting called for and facilitated by the Society's Chief Inspector, Andries Venter, is the first step towards finding better ways and means of collaborating and pooling resources to improve the likelihood of success for all seal rescue missions" It will also hopefully change critic's opinions regarding the sincere lengths that the authorities and SPCA are prepared to go to when it comes to rescuing seals.

Said Mike Meyer of Marine and Coastal Management (MCM), "seal pup strandings are largely due to adverse weather and rough sea conditions, which sometimes result in the youngsters being separated from their mothers and being washed ashore. Sadly for some pups the prognosis (despite the rescuer's best efforts) are hopeless but, with this joint initiative we are hopeful that many more seal pups will have a far better chance of survival".

"The CoGH SPCA has over the past few years established a very viable and well equipped Wildlife Unit that has achieved remarkable results despite the challenges involving the capture, transportation, care and release of a wide variety of wild animals - including adult and juvenile (non-pup) individuals of several seal species - and we believe that a well coordinated, collaborative effort will help achieve even more success. We wish the team every success with their rescue plans and efforts", said Perrins.

Perrins paid tribute to the experienced MCM team for their professional assistance and for allowing the SPCA use of it's aquarium facilities for the rehabilitation of seals, which more often than not requires intensive hands on care and supervision to ensure survival and successful release of stranded individuals. Perrins also cautioned against people trying to personally save seals as they have a potentially lethal bite and furthermore, may easily become habituated when fed, increasing the likelihood of conflict between these individuals and fishermen.

Within the first week of September, the team will regroup to further strategise and finalise action plans.

Ends