

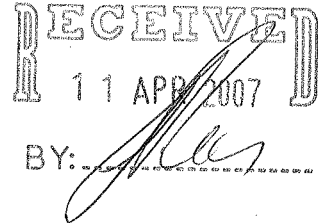


Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Water Resources
Australian Antarctic Division

Dr Andrew Southcott MP (Chair)
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Department of House of Representatives
P O Box 6021
CANBERRA ACT 2600

10 April 2007



Dear Dr Southcott,

Further to the public hearings on 26 March 2007 of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties concerning the proposed treaty action Measure 4 (2006) Specially Protected Species: Fur Seals, I am pleased to provide the following additional information on notice to assist the Joint Standing Committee in its deliberations.

Tagging of Seals at Macquarie Island:

The Australian Antarctic Ethics Committee imposes strict ethical standards for research on fur seal and elephant seal populations at Macquarie Island. Branding is strictly prohibited. Tagging of seals involves the insertion of a small tag into the flipper of the animal.

Clarification of the timing of commercial sealing in the Antarctic region:

The large scale commercial hunting of fur seals in the Southern Ocean started in the late 1700s and many species were close to extirpation by the early 1800s. New sites were discovered and sealing continued at smaller scales in many locations, effectively 'mopping up' any early recovery of populations exploited at earlier times. This sealing continued through to the early 20th Century.

Details of the recovery of fur seal populations in the Antarctic region from the 1960s:

Antarctic fur seals were considered extinct until a colony of about 1,000-3,000 Antarctic fur seals was discovered at Bird Island, South Georgia in 1950. This population then recovered at a spectacular rate and emigrated from this founder colony to many previous sites in its former range. In the past half century this population has grown to over 1.6 million. About 95 per cent of these seals still live around South Georgia, but other colonies around the Southern Ocean are continuing to recover at a rapid rate (almost 10 per cent each year).

The recovery of sub-Antarctic fur seals has also most likely taken place in the past 50 years. Its population is smaller (>300,000) and is primarily located on Gough Island (South Atlantic Ocean) and the southern Indian Ocean islands of Prince Edward and Amsterdam.

Relationship between Antarctic fur seals and the northern fur seal:

The northern fur seal: *Callorhinus ursinus*, is a different genus and species; and thus entirely unrelated to the fur seal species to which Measure 4 (2006) Specially Protected Species: Fur Seals applies; namely the Antarctic fur seal: *Arctocephalus gazella*, and the sub-Antarctic fur seal: *A. tropicalis*.

Yours sincerely,

Virginia Mudie
A/g Director