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Department of Biodiversity,  
Conservation and Attractions

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# Viewing wild seals

In order to assist people wishing to view wild seals, please follow the rules set out below.

## 1. KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE AT ALL TIMES.

Sea lions near Perth that are used to people may tolerate you approaching them on land to as close as 5 to 10m. Other sea lions and fur seals are likely to rush to the water, or even attack you if you approach even this close. NEVER TRY TO TOUCH WILD SEALS. The best approach on land is to move slowly, and stop **at least** 5-10m away, or sooner if the animal shows any response to your presence.

DO NOT LEAVE UNSUPERVISED CHILDREN ANYWHERE NEAR SEALS. ALSO, NEVER WALK BETWEEN A SEAL AND THE WATER; always leave the animal an escape route to the water. Fur seals should not be approached on land, as they will almost always rush to the water, causing great disturbance to the animals. They are best observed quietly from a boat a safe distance from their rocky resting site.

SEA LIONS AND FUR SEALS ARE VERY DANGEROUS WHEN BREEDING. It is essential to keep away from islands where they breed, and never try to walk among a colony of breeding seals. Your local CALM office can let you know where and when these animals are breeding.

## 2. DO NOT FEED THE SEALS: LET THE SEA LIONS AND FUR SEALS GET THEIR OWN FOOD.

People who feed wild seals are endangering the seals and putting themselves and other people at risk. Fed seals quickly lose fear of people. Some will beg for food, behave aggressively towards people to get food, and often become dangerously entangled in hooks, lures and fishing line. On occasion, seals have seriously bitten divers, swimmers and other people, either to get food or perhaps because they see people as competing for food.

Seals accustomed to handouts may try to enter boats or steal fish from fishing nets and may become a nuisance to fishers. Seals that lose their fear of people are at great risk of being attacked by people who do not appreciate their approaches. There are many examples of serious bites being inflicted on well-intentioned people who offer fish to a 'friendly' sea lion.

## 3. SWIMMING TOO CLOSE TO SEA LIONS AND FUR SEALS CAN BE DANGEROUS.

Sea lions have inflicted serious injuries to swimmers who were trying to have a close look or imitate their behaviour. Remember to keep **at least** 10m away from seals in the water. If a sea lion or fur seal approaches you closer than 10m in the water, swim slowly away and get out of the water. Seal colonies along the south and west coast are also popular haunts for great white sharks, and swimming in these waters can be dangerous.

## 4. LEAVE THE DOG AT HOME.

Sea lions and fur seals do not mix with dogs. An inquisitive dog represents a threat to a seal and the results will invariably be a problem. Serious diseases can be transmitted between dogs and seals.

## 5. TAKE YOUR RUBBISH HOME WITH YOU.

Apart from polluting our beautiful coastline, rubbish and debris dropped at sea or on beaches can be dangerous to sea lions and fur seals. Each year seals die a terrible slow death from entanglement or ingestion of plastic and other rubbish.

## 6. RESPECT THE ANIMALS AND THEY WILL TOLERATE YOUR PRESENCE.

It is very easy to photograph and enjoy sea lions and fur seals in a safe manner, without disturbing them. Use common sense when boating or landing on beaches with seals and give the animals plenty of space. Don't try to get the animals to sit up or enter the water by making noises or throwing anything. Enjoy the privilege of interacting with sea lions and fur seals; if you do it in a responsible manner the opportunity will remain for future generations.

## Further Information

For further information or advice, please contact the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) at:

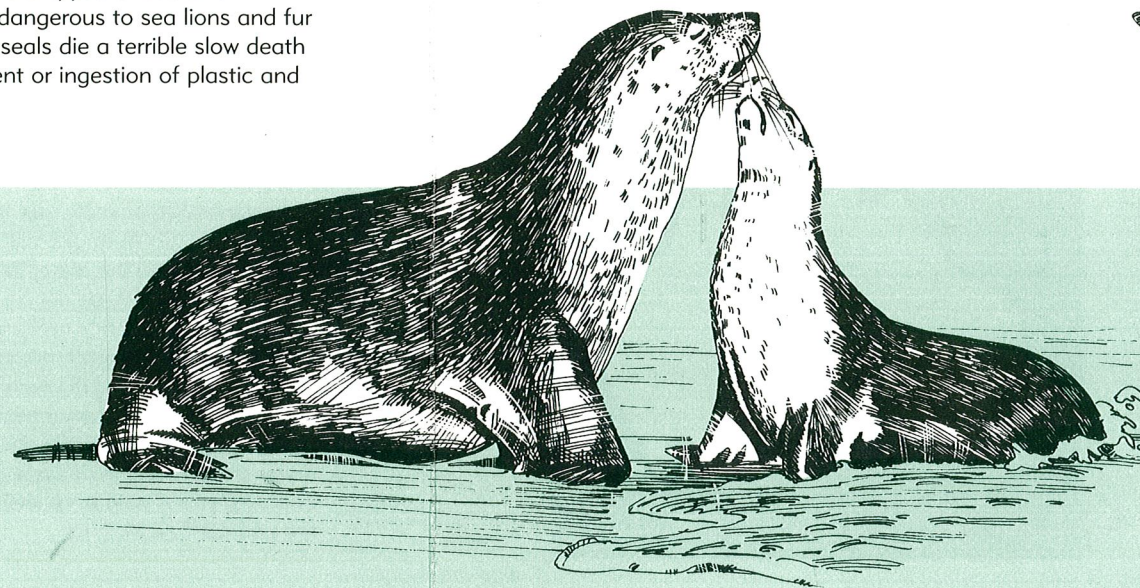
### Wildlife Branch

17 Dick Perry Avenue  
Technology Park, Western Precinct  
KENSINGTON WA 6151  
Tel: (08) 9334 0333

Or visit your nearest CALM office and CALM's NatureBase website at <http://www.calm.wa.gov.au>



Department of Conservation  
and Land Management



# Sea Lions and Fur Seals



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and Land Management

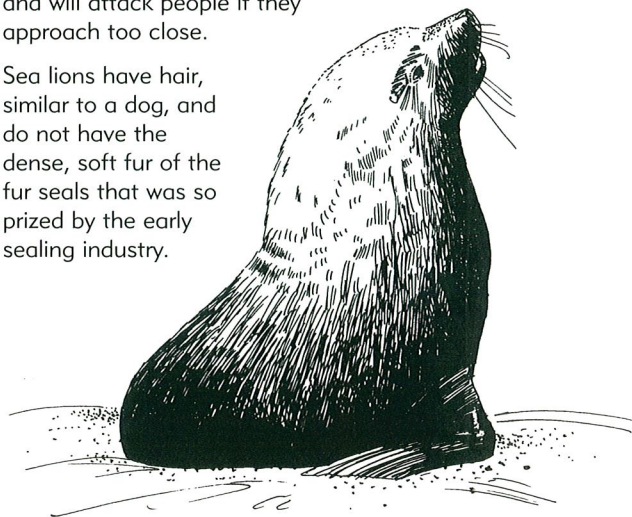


In Western Australia we are privileged to have Australian sea lions and New Zealand fur seals living and breeding around the southern half of our State. These extraordinary wild animals can be seen and enjoyed by everyone, but they can be dangerous and are easily disturbed. They should always be approached with care, and admired from a safe distance. Both these species are 'eared seals': they have easily visible earflaps in contrast to 'true seals', such as leopard seals, which have no visible ears.

## Sea Lions

Australian sea lions live only in Western Australia and South Australia and are among the rarest of the world's seal species. The total population is thought to be about 10,000, but is perhaps decreasing in some areas. About 1,000 sea lions live on our west coast (between the Abrolhos Islands and Perth) and 2,000 on the south coast (between Albany and Israelite Bay). Sea lions are marvellous divers and spend their time at sea feeding close to the seabed in depths that can exceed 300 metres. Their feeding is opportunistic, with fish, sharks, squid, octopus, cuttlefish, lobster and even occasionally birds and turtles being included in their diet. Unlike all other seals, which breed annually, the sea lions breed every 17.5 months, and do so at different times at different islands. During the breeding season the females defend their pups tenaciously and will attack people if they approach too close.

Sea lions have hair, similar to a dog, and do not have the dense, soft fur of the fur seals that was so prized by the early sealing industry.



Sea lions were hunted for their meat and leather, particularly in the early nineteenth century, but are now specially protected.

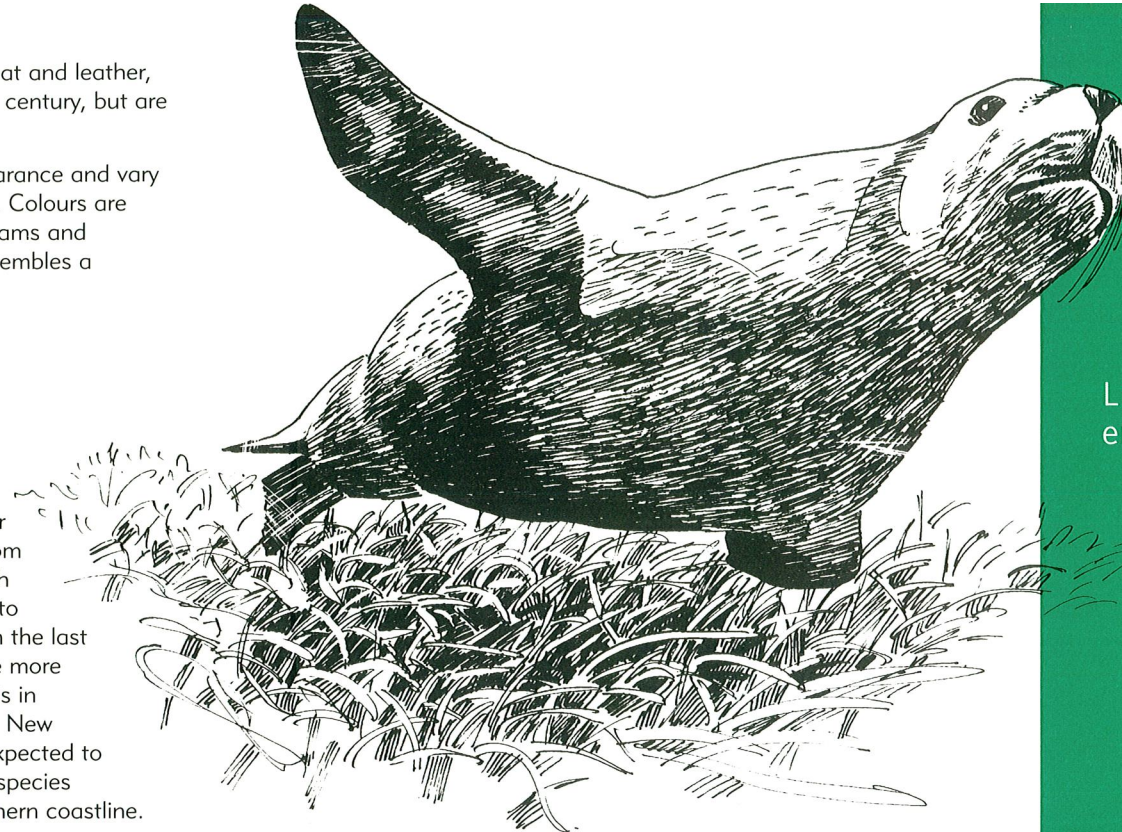
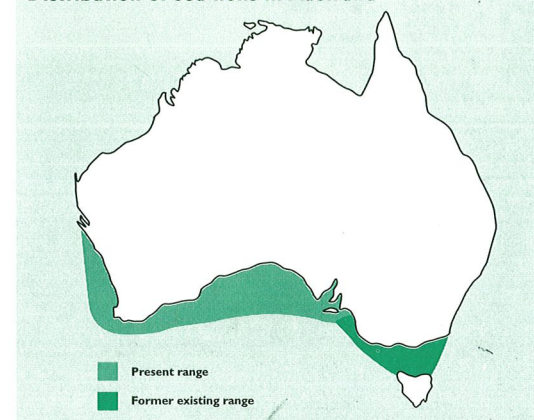
Sea lions are quite robust in appearance and vary in colour between sexes and ages. Colours are usually a combination of tans, creams and browns. They have a face that resembles a Labrador dog.

## Fur Seals

New Zealand fur seals live and breed along the south coast of Australia and New Zealand and nearby sub-Antarctic islands. After being driven close to extinction from hunting during the early nineteenth century, populations have started to recover in a spectacular manner in the last decade. There are now likely to be more than 40,000 New Zealand fur seals in Australia and well over 100,000 in New Zealand. These populations are expected to continue to increase, making this species increasingly visible along our southern coastline.

Fur seals live on exposed rocky islands and breed in December and January each year. They dive and feed mainly at night, often along the edge of our continental shelf. Their diet is less varied than that of the sea lions; they prefer to feed on small schooling fish and squid.

Distribution of sea lions in Australia



Fur seals are smaller than sea lions and have a face which is comparatively more pointed and fox-like. They have a silver-grey coat, which often appears dark grey or even brown, and they look very streamlined and sleek when wet.

## Other seal species

Occasionally other seals that normally live in the Antarctic or sub-Antarctic visit our coast. Some of these animals are injured or in poor condition. The most common of these are the sub-Antarctic fur seals (which look a bit like New Zealand fur seals), and leopard seals (which are a true seal, are long and sleek, have a slightly reptilian look, and have very large teeth). Elephant seals and crabeater seals are also occasionally encountered.

If you encounter one of these animals on our beaches, you should keep well clear and advise the nearest CALM office.

## Living with, viewing, and enjoying sea lions and fur seals

Sea lions and fur seals are specially protected under the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 administered by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). Penalties apply to people who disturb or harm marine mammals.

It is important to remember that the seals you encounter are not pets or tame. They may have lost some of their fear of people and may tolerate your presence or even be inquisitive toward you. They are, however, unpredictable wild animals that can be dangerous to people, particularly anyone who gets too close, moves too quickly, or somehow threatens or scares them.

Australian sea lions and New Zealand fur seals can carry various diseases, including a type of tuberculosis. While there is only a very slight risk of passing an infection to people, everyone should avoid contact with wild seals and maintain a safe distance of **at least 5 metres** from seals on land and **at least 10 metres** in the water at all times. If a seal approaches closer than these distances, quietly move away.

The key to successfully and safely viewing wild seals is to respect their wild nature. Anything you do that may change a seal's natural behaviour may change the way in which that seal interacts with its environment, and so threaten that animal and possibly the species as a whole. Approach seals carefully and sensitively, and try to view them without changing what they are doing.

Anyone wishing to interact with sea lions or fur seals on a commercial basis requires a licence from CALM and should contact the nearest CALM office for information.