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CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

To 'conserve' is to protect and maintain while to 'manage' is to assess, develop a strategy and do something, even if the 'something' is to decide to do nothing! Conservation and management of a species rely on the recognition of influencing factors, and determining whether and how these can be best managed or mitigated. The priority for managers is usually to mitigate anthropogenic factors.

At present, otariids in southern Australian waters generally are considered to be an important component of marine ecosystems in which humans also utilise a range of marine natural resources (e.g. fisheries, oil and gas, ecotourism, wave energy and desalination plants). As key predators, healthy seal populations to some extent demonstrate healthy ecosystems. Seals are afforded a degree of protection that is less than that of humans and cetaceans, but above that of fish and invertebrates. This has not always been Australian society's attitude toward seals, and may not be the attitude held by them in the future.

Attitudes

Prior to European settlement, Aboriginal Australians viewed all wildlife with respect and utilised it as a source of commodities, principally food. Early European settlers also valued the commodities but quickly realised the economic potential of large numbers of seal pelts and blubber. In diaries, some Europeans described their affection for the individual seals, pitied them perhaps, and recognised that the harvest was unsustainable. Generally, though, the attitude of sealers and merchants was to harvest as many seals as possible before a competitor discovered them. Sealing was a very important industry in the establishment of European settlement in Australia. Most of the commodities required for society to function at that time had to be sourced from Europe. Sealing provided the first large-scale industry exporting raw materials of high value (seal skins and oil). The product required limited processing