



Australian sea lion (*Neophoca cinerea*)

This overview provides information about the Australian sea lion, a species identified as a priority for H5 bird flu preparedness and response in Western Australia.

About the species

Australian sea lions are endemic to Australia and are one of six sea lion species found globally. In Western Australia, their range extends from the Houtman Abrolhos Islands to the south coast and along the Great Australian Bight into South Australia.

Australian sea lions use coastal islands, rocky platforms and sandy beaches for breeding, resting and haul-out. They are specialised seafloor foragers and feed on a range of prey, including fish, squid, cuttlefish, octopus, sharks, rays and rock lobsters.

Australian sea lions have one of the slowest reproductive rates of any pinniped species, producing a single pup approximately every 18 months. Females typically return to the same breeding colony throughout their lives, resulting in relatively isolated breeding populations.

research, monitoring and recovery efforts across their range.

The species has experienced long-term population decline associated with historical exploitation and ongoing human-related pressures. Australian sea lions have also been identified as having a very high risk of impacts from H5 bird flu, with potentially significant consequences for already declining populations.

Why might Australian sea lions be vulnerable to H5 bird flu?

Australian sea lions are presumed to be highly susceptible to H5 bird flu based on overseas outbreaks in related sea lion species, including significant mortality in South American sea lions.

Australian sea lions are gregarious animals that gather at breeding and haul-out sites. They may be exposed to H5 bird flu through close contact with infected seabirds and shorebirds in shared coastal and island habitats, through contaminated environments, or potentially through contact with or consumption of infected birds.

Their slow reproductive rate and strong breeding site-fidelity may reduce the ability of affected colonies to recover from significant mortality caused by disease. For some populations, impacts from H5 bird flu may occur alongside other pressures already affecting population health and recovery.

Conservation status and H5 bird flu risk

EPBC Act status (Cth)	Endangered
BC Act status (WA)	Endangered
IUCN Red list status	Endangered
WA H5 Bird flu risk rating	Very high

EPBC Act = *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth); BC Act = *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (WA).

Why is this species a priority?

Australian sea lions are highly charismatic and hold significant conservation, tourism and public interest value. They are the focus of extensive conservation,



AVOID



RECORD



REPORT 1800 675 888

Current conservation and management actions

Australian sea lions are supported through a range of conservation, research and management activities across their range. These include:

- population monitoring and research programs, including remote camera monitoring at key haul-out sites and surveys of breeding colonies
- management of human interactions through temporary closures of breeding islands, prescribed separation distances and a management program for seal interactions
- protection of important breeding sites within marine and terrestrial parks and reserves, and other management measures such as fisheries gillnet exclusion zones.
- fitting of sea lion exclusion devices to rock lobster pots to reduce the risk of entanglement
- resilience-building projects at breeding colonies, including at the Abrolhos Islands and Jurien Bay, involving actions such as pup shelters and treatment of hookworm disease in pups.

What response actions may be implemented?

If H5 bird flu is detected in areas inhabited by Australian sea lions, response actions may be implemented based on a risk assessment of the situation.

Actions may include:

- temporary restrictions on public access or activities involving wildlife to minimise biosecurity risks, reduce disturbance to wildlife and support response activities
- removal and disposal of wildlife carcasses where required
- additional biosecurity measures, including cleaning and disinfection of footwear and equipment
- increased surveillance and monitoring of birds and other wildlife
- investigation of reports of sick or dead wildlife, including collecting samples where required
- supporting the welfare and protection of affected wildlife
- providing information and updates to increase awareness.

What additional actions may help Australian sea lions?

A range of actions may help reduce disease impacts and improve the resilience of Australian sea lion populations. Supporting healthy populations, reducing disturbance and addressing key threats may support Australian sea lions to better withstand and recover from H5 bird flu outbreaks.

Actions may include:

- expanding hookworm disease surveillance and treatment programs to improve pup health and survival
- increasing the availability of pup shelters and natural shade, including through habitat restoration at selected breeding colonies, to reduce heat stress and other causes of pup mortality
- expanding surveillance of sea lion populations, seabirds and disease occurrence at breeding and haul-out sites
- improving understanding of population health through targeted health monitoring and disease investigations
- strengthening biosecurity measures and reducing human disturbance at breeding and haul-out sites during periods of elevated disease risk
- further reducing human-related threats, including fisheries interactions, entanglement in marine debris and disturbance at breeding and haul-out sites
- exploring future vaccination opportunities should a safe and effective mammal vaccine become available and appropriate approvals obtained.

How you can help

AVOID. RECORD. REPORT.

If you see sick or dead wildlife:

- Avoid contact with wildlife and do not touch sick or dead animals.
- Record what you see, including the location and take photographs where safe to do so.
- Report unusual wildlife illness or deaths to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

You can also help Australian sea lions by following signs and management advice, observing wildlife from a distance, avoiding contact with and not feeding sea lions or other wildlife, keeping dogs away from wildlife, disposing of rubbish appropriately, avoiding disturbance at breeding and haul out sites, and cleaning footwear and equipment when moving between wildlife areas.

Important: This document describes how authorities may prepare for and respond to H5 bird flu in Western Australia. Response measures will depend on the circumstances and may change over time. Additional measures may be implemented where required to protect wildlife, livestock, people and the environment.



Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions

www.wa.gov.au/avian_influenza