



Concerns over dolphin and sea lion deaths in Australian fishery

Following the death of a critically endangered Australian sea lion, the **Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA)** yesterday announced an 18-month closure to gillnet fishing within a section of the Australian sea lion Management Zone off South Australia.

While there is still some way to go to eradicate accidental deaths ('bycatch') of our threatened marine species, the **Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS)** and the **Humane Society International (HSI)** are today praising the improved response by managers of this fishery. However concerns remain that sea lions and dolphins will continue to be drowned in this South Australian shark fishery.

"AMCS and HSI are pleased that AFMA has taken expert advice into account and closed the zone to allow our critically endangered Australian sea lions to breed in peace," said **Tooni Mahto, Marine Campaigner for the AMCS**. "However, we have significant concerns about ongoing impacts to Australian Sea Lions which may not be picked up by the current electronic monitoring system."

There have been significant bycatch issues in the Gillnet Hook and Trap (GHAT) sector of the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery (SESSF) that operates off Southern Australia. The GHAT fishery targets gummy shark, which is marketed as 'flake'. Not least of these concerns is the apparent impact of this fishery on local dolphins. Between September 2010 and September 2011, 45 dolphins were killed in this fishery, resulting in a substantial closure in September 2011. AMCS and HSI welcomed this closure but expressed concerns that the dolphin deaths are indicative of broader bycatch problem.

"With the reported deaths of a further 11 dolphins over the past few months it is clear that bycatch is a fishery-wide issue that has yet to be sufficiently addressed," said **Alexia Wellbelove, of HSI**. "It is essential that these issues are dealt with swiftly and effectively by fisheries managers," **Wellbelove** said.

"AFMA responded swiftly to the 45 dolphin deaths reported last year by implementing area closures, but AMCS and HSI firmly believe that gillnetting should be banned until seafood can be caught without the death of our vulnerable ocean wildlife."

The SESSF is one of Australia's largest and most complex fisheries, stretching from Cape Leeuwin in South Western Australia to the waters off Fraser Island off the Queensland coast. The Commonwealth Government is currently reassessing the export approval for fish products from the SESSF, which is due to expire on the 30th July 2012.

Media Contacts:

Tooni Mahto, Marine Campaigner, AMCS - 0467 081258

Alexia Wellbelove, Senior Program Manager, HSI - 0415 954600