



To: Councilmember Joe LaCava

From: San Diego Coastkeeper

Re: Request for Support to Protect the Sea Lion Rookery, La Jolla, CA

We urgently request that the City of San Diego take immediate action to curb the frequent, illegal harassment and disturbance of California sea lions at Boomer's Beach and Point La Jolla. As stated in the City's Emergency Coastal Development Permit, which closed this specific area from August 10, 2021 through September 15, 2021, "[a] coastal emergency exists." This emergency has continued, and is ongoing.

The annual sea lion pupping and breeding season occurs in late May through October 31. This past summer, despite the City's closure of the rookery for over a month, over 300 visitors at any given time were observed by docents illegally touching, petting, taking selfies, picking up pups, and repeatedly disturbing these animals. In September and October 2020, City Rangers working only weekends counted over 400 visitors illegally harassing the sea lions. The City is well aware of this problem via press reports, video recordings, photos, phone calls, and emails documenting repeated instances of harassment of the sea lions, and reports of sea lion injuries or fatalities sustained as a result of both accidental and malicious interactions by humans.

California sea lions are highly intelligent social pinnipeds near the top of the food chain and are thus vital to ecosystem balance. They are protected by the Federal Marine Mammal Protection Act ("MMPA"), California Coastal Act, State Wildlife laws, and the City Municipal Code. For example, Section 30230 of the Coastal Act states, "[m]arine resources shall be maintained, enhanced, and where feasible, restored." Section II of the MMPA prohibits the "harassment" of marine mammals, which includes any "act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance" which could injure a marine mammal, or cause "disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering."

Unfortunately, these laws and regulations have been routinely ignored. We understand that there are legal and logistical difficulties regarding municipal enforcement of state or federal laws. However, this gap in enforcement is a major contributing factor to the unabated, ongoing harassment of our local sea lion population. For precisely this reason, the City must work with its state and federal counterparts to find an immediate solution to this problem.

During the first four months of a pup's life, they cannot swim well, putting them in great danger of drowning when people block their path to dry land during high tides. In addition, they risk being abandoned by their mothers if humans touch them during the first two months of life. Mothers nurse their pups for up to 12 months as pups cannot forage for food themselves until they are seven months old.



Public safety is another major concern and reason for people to keep a reasonable distance from sea lions. When people encroach on the sea lions' space, they have been observed to growl, bite, and chase them away. The terrain at Point La Jolla and Boomer's Beach is rocky and uneven sandstone, which is very slippery, causing many visitors to lose their balance and fall.

We support:

- 1) Closing all public access to Boomer's Beach and Point La Jolla during the pupping season from May 1st to October 31st.
- 2) Staffing rangers at the Rookery year-round.
- 3) Identifying, implementing, and enforcing a specific distance for people to stay away from sea lions.
- 4) Prohibiting dogs at Point La Jolla and Boomer's beach year-round.

Please take action to protect both the sea lions and the public.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lucero Sanchez", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lucero Sanchez
Community Policy Coordinator
San Diego Coastkeeper