

Children's Pool or "Caca Cove"?

Already unpopular with fishermen, the harbour seals of California are making new enemies by using a popular bathing spot as a latrine. And since their rights to life and to defecate in public are legally protected, there's nothing we can do about it — or nothing sensible, anyway.

Since last September, San Diego City Council has banned swimming from a popular pocket beach in La Jolla once known as Children's Pool, or Casa Cove. Nowadays, the disgruntled residents call the polluted beach "Caca" Cove.

The "caca" has been provided courtesy of a local seal population that has been proliferating offshore at Seal Rock, an outcrop that was designated a marine mammal reserve in 1995. There are now so many seals they sometimes swamp the beach, and while toilets are provided for humans, the seals just do their business directly in the water.

Now the level of fecal coliform bacteria in the water is so high that city officials consider it unsafe for human bathers.

Most local residents want the seals removed and the beach reclaimed for humans, but shooting them is not an option because the seals have been granted the right to life under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

Meanwhile, tourists and local businesses which cater to them are happy the way things are. "You have lots and lots of tour buses full of people coming to La Jolla to see the seals," said Chris Breakwater, city lifeguard chief, to the *San Diego Union-Tribune* (Feb. 18). "And that's not something to sniff at."

And animal rightists think the seals should not only be left alone, but should be given even more protection. One resident, Donald Riley, has even filed a lawsuit alleging that the city should place a barrier around the seals to prevent humans from intimidating and harassing them, which he contends is a violation of the MMPA.

Worst Option

Caught between a rock and a hard place, the City Council has decided to take another approach to the problem that could cost the city \$40,000, while providing no guarantee of a solution.

On May 6, the Council decided that the best way to get rid of the

seals would be to destroy the beach. A permit will now be sought from the state Coastal Commission to remove 3,000 of the estimated 4,200 cubic yards of sand, and haul it to another beach nearby at a cost of between \$20,000 and \$40,000.

The excavation work will reduce the width of the beach by 75%, which it is hoped will dissuade the seals from coming ashore. It will also enable the city to reopen four sealed-up sluiceways at the base of a concrete breakwater that were plugged years ago after a child became trapped in one and drowned, and are now under several feet of sand. This is expected to improve the water circulation and, hopefully, eliminate the contamination.

The plan is fraught with uncertainties and risks, however.

Firstly, there is a chance that reopening the sluiceways will simply cause more sand to accumulate, thus building a new beach for the seals to shit on.

Secondly, it does not address the problem of humans and seals interacting. Once the water has been cleaned up, humans and seals will be swimming together again, and while seals may look cute, they are wild animals and can bite. As some observers have noted, it is only a matter of time before a child gets bitten and the city ends up contesting a personal-injury lawsuit.



ECO-TOURISM OR A LOAD OF CRAP? This tour group travelled all the way from Boise, Idaho, to watch some Californian seals shitting on the beach.

Fisherman's Friend

"Hey, get your own!" says this fisherman to the "fur bags" crowding the deck of his squid purse seiner.

Since the Marine Mammal Protection Act was passed in 1972, seals and sea lions have become the scourge of West Coast fishermen, and are threatening steelhead and salmon stocks returning to rivers to spawn.

Now the case of Caca Cove has once more thrown into sharp relief the short-sightedness of legislation that grants



Photo: Mick Kronman

any animal the right to life. And the situation can only get worse. California's harbour

seal population, estimated at between 32,000 and 35,000, rises at 4% per year, and the

sealion population has grown from 30,000 when the MMPA was drafted to 180,000 today.

"We're going to see more and more instances of marine mammals hauling out on the mainland in the coming years," said Joseph Cordaro, a federal wildlife biologist, to the *Union-Tribune* (May 7).

So how much more "caca" can Californians take?



Stale Beers and Stale Jokes

Dave McTaggart of Greenpeace International sneaks in a few beers at the Al Bustan, secure in the belief that the *Harpoon* would let him off the hook this year. After all, how many times can we recycle the tale of the Forbes article (September 1991) exposing his life of deception and greed? And we say, how many times can Greenpeace recycle the tale of whales being threatened species? What do you say Dave? Shall we all get some fresh pints?

