

Media Release



14th July, 2006

FURRY VISITOR TO OUR SHORES

Local residents have noticed an Australian Fur Seal who has been making his way backwards and forwards along the Jan Juc / White's Beach area over the past two weeks.

Dr Anne Fowler from Torquay Animal House has been keeping a professional eye on our visitor's progress. Seals "haul out" (take extended rests on land) for a number of reasons, and Anne advises that this one is not sick or injured, but has just chosen the protection of this area to have a rest.

This is a young seal which is most likely from the colony at The Nobbys, and has become disoriented whilst out fishing. He will eventually work out where "home" is and swim back.

Great Ocean Road Coast Committee Executive Officer, David Clarke said "We urge everyone to stay well clear of the seal (at least 10 metres) to avoid placing him under any duress".

Please do not swim with the seal! Parents and carers are asked to keep children away, and not allow them to pat, feed or interact with the seal in any way. Seals have flexible necks and sharp teeth, and even a very docile looking creature can move its head quickly and inflict a nasty bite. Seals can carry a number of diseases, including tuberculosis, so it is a good idea to avoid being bitten.

Mr Clarke said "Resting seals can be vulnerable to attacks from dogs and feral animals, so please keep dogs on a leash when walking in the vicinity".

One vital reason to keep dogs and seals separate is that our dogs carry the distemper virus. Distemper in the Arctic has had a devastating effect on seal and other animal populations, and was thought to have originated from mainland canines. The Antarctic is free from this disease, and keeping our dogs away from visiting seals is one way of helping to make sure we don't introduce this disease into the fragile Antarctic ecosystem. Dogs also run the risk being bitten if they antagonize a resting seal, often with nasty results.

Taking these simple steps will give the seal the greatest chance of making his way back to where it belongs.

As always, please continue to report any items of interest or concern along the coastal reserves to the Great Ocean Road Coast Committee office on 5261 2496.

For media enquiries please contact:

David Clarke

Executive Officer, Great Ocean Road Coast Committee

ph: 5220 5027; 0417 354 707

email: david.c@gorcc.com.au

website: www.gorcc.com.au