



## Media release

28 October 2019

### **Aucklands resident leopard seal potentially shot in the face**

On Saturday morning, Owha the leopard seal was found with a severe puncture wound to her face.

Dr. Ingrid Visser, co-founder of LeopardSeals.org, said “the wound was confirmed by three veterinarians as likely the result of a gunshot.” Since then concerns have been raised for Owha with regards to potential complications.

Vets and LeopardSeals.org have determined that at this stage intervention would not be helpful to Owha because of the risks involved for the seal during capture and sedation and that monitoring is the best course of action at present.

Visser, stated that she was “horrified to hear that this incredible animal was attacked in this way.” She added “I’ve spent hours with Owha and there is absolutely no excuse for someone to do this.” She acknowledged that many New Zealanders are incredibly dedicated to protecting animals such as Owha and anticipates public outrage from this event.

LeopardSeals.org will continue to monitor her carefully to check for any change in her behaviour or body condition. LeopardSeals.org request that the public report any sightings of leopard seals immediately to 0800 LEOPARD (0800 536 7273) to assist the team in monitoring Owha’s movements.

Dr. Krista Hupman, NIWA Marine Mammal Biologist and co-founder of LeopardSeals.org commented that “we are working closely with the Department of Conservation and leading wildlife veterinarians to assess what the next steps will be. We ask everyone to give her the space that she needs while she deals with this injury.”

DOC Auckland operations manager, Kirsty Prior has suggested that they will be “undertaking an investigation to determine what has happened”, and requests, if members of the public have any information on Owha's injury, that they contact 0800 DOCHOT as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. In 2018, a young leopard seal was shot in the face with a .22 rifle and a shotgun and was killed. Youths were identified by the public as the culprits.

Leopard seals are a native resident species within New Zealand that are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act 1978. It is an offence under this act to disturb, harass, harm, injure or kill a seal. Anyone charged under the MMPA with harassing, disturbing, injuring or killing a seal faces a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment or a fine to a maximum of \$250,000.

Please contact Dr Krista Hupman (022 025 6290) for comment.

Photos below



CITE: Giverny Forbes – LeopardSeals.org



CITE: Alex Grabham – LeopardSeals.org



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