

Species Showdown



By Dave Harasti

AUSTRALIAN SEA LION

Neophoca cinerea

AUSTRALIAN FUR SEAL

Arctocephalus pusillus doriferus

Taxonomy	Family Otariidae	Family Otariidae
Distribution	This species can be found in the cool temperate waters of southern Australia, with colonies found from the Abrolhos Islands near Geraldton in Western Australia east to Kangaroo Island in South Australia.	Restricted distribution around the islands of Bass Strait, parts of Tasmania, and southern Victoria. Australian fur seals can be seen coming ashore on islands off South Australia and areas of southern New South Wales such as Montague Island and Jervis Bay, with animals occasionally seen on the NSW mid-north coast.
Morphology	The Australian sea lion differs from other seals found in the northern hemisphere in that it has external ears ¹ , and also uses its front flippers ² to propel through the water. The males are commonly referred to as "bulls" – they have very thick necks and powerful shoulders. Bulls are brown in colour while the females have silver colouration on their backs with cream streaks down the sides.	The Australian fur seal can be recognised by its broad head ³ , pointed snout ⁴ , and long backward-sweeping facial whiskers ⁵ . The females are smaller than males and mature males carry a dark mane of coarse hair. The fur seal body is robust and covered in thick brown-layered hair, except on the front and rear flippers.
Size	Males grow up to 2.5m long with the adult females only growing to approximately 1.8m.	The largest of all the fur seals, with males reaching 2.3m in length and weighing up to 360 kg. By comparison, females grow to 1.7m and can weigh up to 100 kg.
Interesting Facts	The Australian sea lion is a very inquisitive animal – when a boat pulls up to a colony the sea lions dart into the water to investigate and play with the divers. Their speed and movements underwater make us look like mere mortals, and they have been recorded diving to depths of 270m, holding their breath for at least seven minutes	The fur seal is fully protected in Australia, though its numbers are still only half those of the historic pre-sealing days. It's believed there are about 30,000 animals now; however, the fur seal continues to be vulnerable to disturbances at its breeding sites, and suffers some losses as a result of interaction with commercial fishing operations.



Similar to large dogs and bears, both the fur seal and sea lion have a set of carnivore-like teeth, which they use to feed on a variety of bony fish species, crustaceans, squid and octopus. They are very skilful hunters and adept at taking a fisherman's catch off his line or entering fish aquaculture farms to steal a free meal. SDDA