



14 NOV, 2019

## Drug helps sea lions beat deadly disease

Adelaide Advertiser, Adelaide

Page 1 of 2

# Drug helps sea lions beat deadly disease

**MICHELLE ETHERIDGE**

VULNERABLE sea lion pups on Kangaroo Island are being given a fighting chance to beat a killer disease and boost their population.

There are an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 sea lions in Australia – about 80 per cent of them living in our state.

The population was drastically reduced by hunting during the 1800s and hasn't recovered since, but now scientists are helping them battle another threat.

Adelaide, Sydney and Macquarie universities have partnered to trial a topical antiparasite drug at Seal Bay Conservation Park on Kangaroo Island, to treat pups suffering from the deadly hookworm disease.

The State Government has contributed \$70,000 towards the project's \$300,000 cost.

Environment Department spokeswoman Melanie Stonnill said up to 40 per cent of all dead pups were found to have died because of the infection, which causes bloody diarrhoea and nutrient loss, resulting in starvation.

The trial will be carried out on 180 pups over summer, accounting for about half of all those born in the conservation park.

Dr Rachael Gray, of the

University of Sydney's School of Veterinary Science, said the

infection was transferred from mothers to pups during nursing. "But if the pup survives the infection, which they shed naturally at around two to three months of age, then they can survive the impact of this parasite," Dr Gray said.

The project follows a smaller treatment trial during 2017 at the Dangerous Reef Australian

sea lion colony in the Spencer Gulf. "The treatment has already been proven safe for pups and has shown a 100 per cent success rate in removing hookworm," Dr Gray said.

During the 2017/18 breeding season, 75 pups died at Seal Bay, 30 of them as a result of hookworm.





14 NOV, 2019

## Drug helps sea lions beat deadly disease

Adelaide Advertiser, Adelaide



**NEW HOPE:** Sea lions on Kangaroo Island and, inset, a pup being treated for hookworm. Picture: UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY