

Keep the seals, 63% tell pollsters

25% say they want Children's Pool cleared

By **Mike Lee**, Union-Tribune Staff Writer

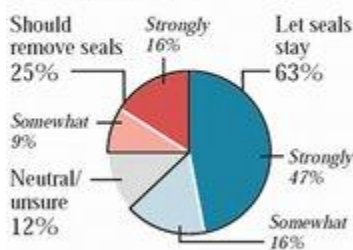
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About 200 seals live at the cove, which state law established as a swimming area for children in 1931. But the seals have contaminated the water. (Howard Lipin / Union-Tribune) -

SEAL POLL

A local research company asked San Diegans the following question: "Do you believe the city should work to remove the seals from the beach at Children's Pool or do you believe the city should let the seals stay at the beach at Children's Pool?"



The poll of 504 adults was taken June 18-22. Margin of error: +/- 4.4 percentage points

SOURCE: Competitive Edge Research & Communication

SHAFFER GRUBB/Union-Tribune

LA JOLLA — Nearly two out of three adult San Diegans polled want city officials to let a colony of seals stay at Children's Pool beach in La Jolla, according to a survey released yesterday by Competitive Edge Research & Communication.

The poll found that 63 percent of those surveyed hope the marine mammals will be allowed to remain, compared with 25 percent who want them gone. The rest are neutral or unsure.

Roughly 200 seals live at the cove, which state law established as a swimming area for children in 1931. But the seals' feces have contaminated the site.

John Nienstedt, president of the San Diego-based Competitive Edge, said his company conducted the survey as a community service, "because it has been an issue that has been rankling people for a long time." A respected pollster, Nienstedt stressed that he didn't have a predetermined conclusion.

The question of whether the seals stay or go could be determined by two ongoing court cases or a bill from state Sen. Christine Kehoe, D-San Diego, that would let the city decide what to do.

In May, San Diego said it would use a speaker system to amplify the sounds of barking dogs in hopes of scaring the seals off the beach. The estimated cost: at least \$689,000 a year.

Nienstedt said some of the pro-seal sentiment found in the survey may be a reaction against the city's "almost Keystone Cop-ish" proposal for dispersing the animals.

"But I think it's mainly that there is not a lot of support for seal removal," he said.

Competitive Edge's findings follow a 2007 survey commissioned by the Animal Protection and Rescue League in San Diego. Done by Zogby International, that poll showed that more than 80 percent of those surveyed said the beach should be reserved for educational seal watching, not swimming.

Under a 2005 Superior Court ruling, San Diego needs to reduce bacterial pollution at the cove so it can be restored for human use. But a federal judge has issued a temporary restraining order that prevents the seals from being harassed.

Meanwhile, the Senate has approved Kehoe's bill. On Monday, the Natural Resources Committee of the Assembly supported the legislation 8-0. If approved by the full Assembly, the measure could go to the governor before July 20, when the next Superior Court hearing in the case will be held.

Competitive Edge's poll suggested that the seals are a draw: About 70,000 fewer San Diego families would visit the beach this summer if the seals are no longer there. "If I am a La Jolla shopkeeper . . . in this recession, that 70,000 sounds pretty big to me," Nienstedt said.

His company has done public opinion polling and other research since 1987. For the seal poll, it surveyed 504 randomly selected adults from June 18-22. The margin of error is 4.4 percentage points.

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