



The Story of the Sea Otter in Chile

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Report 2

Present

Despite legal protection, the chungungo remains endangered. In 2024, its global population is estimated to be fewer than 1,000 individuals. In Caleta Chome, 20 km from Concepción, Chile, the local population consists of only about 20 individuals across a 2 km stretch, with an average density of five otters per kilometer. These otters rely on rocky marine ecosystems and need access to freshwater sources near the coast.

1. Habitat Loss – Coastal urbanization and real estate development continue to reduce available habitat for chungungos.
2. Domestic Dogs – Stray and domestic dogs pose a serious threat, often attacking otters or disturbing their burrows.
3. Overharvesting of Algae – Intensive harvesting of cochayuyo (*Durvillaea antarctica*) and kelp species (*Lessonia nigrescens*, *Macrocystis pyrifera*) affects ecosystem stability.
4. Plastic Pollution – Microplastics have become an increasing concern, potentially affecting otters' health.
5. Avian Flu – In 2023, a sea otter was confirmed to have contracted avian flu, highlighting new emerging threats.

Despite the hunting ban, the chungungo remains vulnerable because its habitat is not adequately protected. Conservation efforts must go beyond species-level protection to include ecosystem-level strategies.



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