

Seals on La Jolla beach win another court round

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by Tony Perry

SAN DIEGO -- The seals on the beach at the Children's Pool in La Jolla are on a roll -- in court.

A judge Thursday turned down a request to shorten the rope barrier meant to protect the marine mammals from being harassed by the public.

A group called Friends of the Children's Pool had asked that the rope, now stretching 152 feet, be shortened to 130 feet, thus increasing access to the water for swimmers and divers.



But San Diego County Superior Court Judge Joel Pressman, who recently ruled that the rope should remain year-round, not just in pupping season, turned down the request.

Though Pressman agreed that the city may have tinkered improperly with a permit from the California Coastal Commission, "the fact remains the City Council made a decision to install a permanent rope that is 152 feet in length."

The request to have the rope shortened to 130 feet was opposed by the Animal Protection and Rescue League.

Shortening the rope would mean "people would crowd around the seals, sitting on them and trying to pet them," said Bryan Pease, attorney for the organization.

For two decades, opposing sides have battled in court and the political realm over the presence of the seals on the horseshoe-shaped beach.

One side says the seals should be allowed to remain and be protected. The opposing side says the beach is meant for children and the seals and their droppings imperil public health and restrict access to the tranquil water.

Mayor Bob Filner, who took office in December, is devoutly pro-seal: ordering a surveillance camera installed and that the beach be closed to the public at night to prevent the seals from being mistreated.

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