

# BYCATCH BYLINES

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## HEADLINE ✈

### Where do your levies go?

Benjamin Franklin famously said there were two certainties in the world: death and taxes. Some might feel that fisheries and conservation services levies fall into the same category. This month, we look at the conservation services planned for 2015/16. What can you expect from levied funds in the year ahead?

The Conservation Services Programme Annual Plan (CSPAP) is where Government describes how it will spend conservation services levies each year. Prepared over more than six months and with significant stakeholder input, the CSPAP for July 2015/2016 has recently been released by DOC. The Plan describes three broad categories of work that will be undertaken between now and July 2016. Work covers:

- interactions between marine protected species and New Zealand's commercial fisheries
- population status of protected species interacting with fisheries, and
- mitigation approaches to help manage those interactions.

The Plan also explains how DOC sees the planned CSP work programme fitting with relevant legislation and government policies. What is actually included in this year's Plan? Observer services are a key component of understanding interactions between fisheries and protected species. Seabird and marine mammal populations of interest include black petrel, flesh-footed shearwater, Gibson's albatross, and New Zealand sea lion. Bycatch mitigation projects include liaison officer roles and continuing the development of mitigation measures suitable for New Zealand fisheries.

The administrative costs of the Conservation Services Programme have always been a contentious issue. Good news in this respect is that administration charges have not increased since 2011/12. Also, the CSP team works across DOC and other agencies to pull in non-levied funding and other support wherever possible.

So how can you help ensure that the CSPAP delivers value for money? Get involved. By sending out a few short emails each year, the CSP team keeps stakeholders up to date with its activities and opportunities for input. Contact them and sign up for email news at [csp@doc.govt.nz](mailto:csp@doc.govt.nz).

To find out more about the CSPAP for 2015/06, follow the link in *Want to know more?*



The flesh-footed shearwater – one of the seabirds receiving attention in this year's Conservation Services Programme Annual Plan. Photo: Duncan, CC BY-SA 2.0

## WHAT'S UP? 📄

### Longline liaisons

In past issues we've mentioned the work of Dave Goad and Jamie Williamson, liaison linkmen working with northern inshore longline fishers. How is their work progressing?

So far, the guys have visited 56 bottom and surface longline vessels as part of their liaison work. Their role includes working with fishers on Seabird Management Plans (SMPs), that is, how seabird bycatch risks are addressed on vessels on a daily basis. Keeping it real is critical for developing SMPs. SMPs are not about what's ideal or perfect. Instead, their purpose is to record what actually happens at sea. Having recognised the good work already underway, worthwhile next steps for managing seabird bycatch risks can then be considered on a vessel by vessel basis.

Dave and Jamie's project report is available online. Check the link in *Want to know more?*



A northern inshore longline vessel. Photo: J. Pierre

## WHAT THE FAQ?! 🗨

### High times for Hutton's

Seabirds and mountains don't normally go together. However, the Hutton's shearwater is an exception. These birds make their nests at altitudes of 1200–1800 m, in the Seaward Kaikoura Range. Where do they go the rest of the time?

- Hutton's shearwaters hang around Kaikoura from September through March, near their nest sites. Large flocks can be seen at sea during these months.
- Eggs are laid inside nest burrows and hatch after 50 days. Chicks stay at the nest for around 83 days.
- Outside the breeding season, most birds are thought to travel around Australian waters.
- Like many young New Zealanders, young Hutton's shearwaters spend 4-5 years in Australia, before returning home to breed.



Hutton's shearwater. Photo: DOC

## A whale of a time

What kept six former whalers gazing seaward over Cook Strait for four weeks during June and July? It was DOC's annual whale survey, sponsored by OMV New Zealand. It's been a bumper year for the survey team with a new record set and a famous Australian visitor.

The Cook Strait whale survey started in 2004. Since then, it has seen DOC staff and an army of dedicated volunteers keeping a close eye on the water for 2 to 4 weeks each year. The team includes six former whalers, who watch for whales from Arapawa Island – a base for commercial whaling activities until the 1960s.

The survey team records sightings of all whales seen, and humpback whales are a particular focus. In 2004, 25 humpbacks were observed during the 2-week survey. During the 4-week survey this year, a record number of 137 humpback whales was seen. This included a famous visitor from Australian waters – Migaloo – an entirely white humpback whale. He must be famous – he has his own Twitter account! Migaloo is one of just four white humpbacks known globally. His identity will be confirmed using DNA from the skin sample taken by the survey team. The second sighting in New Zealand waters of a humpback whale calf was also very exciting for the project team.

While most whales seen during the survey are humpbacks, over the years, other species observed have included blue, minke, pygmy blue, southern right, and sperm whales, as well as orca. This year was similar, with blue whales, sperm whales and a southern right whale completing the line-up.



A humpback whale showing the spectacular 'breaching' behaviour this species is famous for. Photo: [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

In addition to recording whale sightings, boat-based members of the survey team photograph whales and collect skin samples from them. This supports individual identification of the animals seen.

Information collected by the survey team is being used to estimate the population of humpback whales. The good news is that humpback numbers in New Zealand waters appear to be recovering from the depletion caused by commercial whaling.

A more modern risk to humpbacks is fishing conducted using cray pots. On two occasions during the survey, humpback whales were seen with cray pot lines and buoys trailing. DOC has a specialist team on call to disentangle whales from cray pots. The risk of entanglement can be minimised by setting pots with the shortest possible lines attached. Avoiding setting pots offshore in deeper water during June and July when whales are on the move also reduces entanglement risks.

So where are the whales now? The humpbacks that pass through New Zealand are on their way to warmer waters in the south Pacific. They will spend the winter there with newborn calves, until it's time to go back to Antarctic waters next summer.

## Of mice and... more mice

The house mouse may seem pretty harmless, but evidence is mounting that this small mammal is murderous towards young seabirds. Mouse attacks on seabirds are best known from overseas, but what about mice here in New Zealand?

In the mid-2000s, video evidence came to light that house mice on Gough Island were literally eating young albatross alive. Gough Island is located in the Atlantic Ocean. Similar to New Zealand's subantarctic islands, it is home to many seabirds. While mice on Gough Island are bigger than in many other locales, it seemed hard to believe that a mouse could take on an albatross chick and win.

Since then, evidence has been mounting against the house mouse. Newly published research from Gough Island reports that in addition to albatross, seven species of petrel chicks are also eaten alive by mice. (To watch a mouse attack on video, follow the link in *Want to know more?*). Some of these seabirds are also found in New Zealand, including the grey petrel, the soft-plumaged petrel, and the broad-billed prion. While we are accustomed to considering rats and stoats as predators of nesting birds, mice have typically been thought more benign.

In winter next year, weapons of mouse destruction will be deployed on Antipodes Island. The effects of mice on seabirds there have not been studied. However, mice are known to have detrimental impacts on terrestrial birds and insects at least. Eradicating mice from this otherwise pest-free island is to be funded jointly by DOC, the Million Dollar Mouse campaign, and the World Wildlife Fund.

This story of mice ... and more mice is not over yet.



The grey petrel – one of the seabirds breeding on New Zealand's Antipodes Island, whose chicks fall foul of mice on Gough Island. Photo: JJ Harrison, CC BY-SA 3.0

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- *Headline:* Check out the Conservation Services Programme Annual Plan for 2015/16 at: <http://tinyurl.com/ozyd9oe>
- *World Watch:* See mouse attacks on video at: <http://tinyurl.com/q9s5d6a>
- *What's up?:* For the full report on Dave and Jamie's liaison activities, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/omj44m2>

## FEEDBACK

To submit feedback or questions, please email: [jpecnz@gmail.com](mailto:jpecnz@gmail.com)

Banner image: DOC/MPI