BYCATCH BYLINES

Issue 03 | January 2013

HEADLINE

A tip-off on sharks

Recently, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) identified another JAWS. This is nothing to do with classic Spielberg movies—instead it stands for Jeepers, Another Worrisome Shark. Populations of many shark species are in decline worldwide, including the oceanic whitetip.

The oceanic whitetip shark was once among the most abundant sharks in the ocean. It occurs worldwide in tropical and warmer temperate open water. However, targeted fishing and bycatch throughout its range have reduced populations significantly. The once-common species is now assessed as globally vulnerable to extinction. This situation led WCPFC, in its role as a Regional Fisheries Management Organisation, to adopt a conservation and management measure which prohibits landings and sales of oceanic whitetip sharks. This measure applies in the WCPFC convention area from 1 January 2013.

So, what does that mean for New Zealand? These sharks are not common here—they are only known from near the Kermadec Islands and off the northeast coast of North Island down to Mahia Peninsula. However, we are members of WCPFC, which means we are now part of the oceanic whitetip support team. As a result, the oceanic whitetip shark will be a legally protected species in New Zealand from 3 January 2013. This means that captures must be managed in the same way as for all protected species accidentally caught in the course of commercial fishing. So, it is not illegal to accidentally catch this shark. However, if you do catch one, you are legally required to report it on the Non-Fish/Protected Species Catch Return. The shark cannot be retained whole, or in parts, and it must be returned to the water.

Away from our waters, vessels fishing on the high seas but flagged to New Zealand are also legally restricted from taking oceanic whitetips.

As for all protected species, careful handling and release of live whitetip sharks will help their chances of survival. Ideally, use dehooking and line cutting tools to remove the fishing gear from around the caught animal. (Remember DOC's distribution of the big blue bag? … It's time to dust it off and get it working again). For a demonstration of dehooking gear working its magic on a shark, see:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZ3FfFDap6I

If you can't remove hooks or all of the netting from a protected animal, leave it with the smallest souvenirs possible: cut the snood as close as you can to the hook, and remove as much net as possible.

An oceanic whitetip shark, clearly showing how it got its name. *Photo: Mazdak Radjainia.*

YOUR VOICE

2012 Seabird SMARTies recognised

Leading seabird-safe fishing practices were highlighted last month through Southern Seabird Solutions' Seabird SMART awards. From the nominations received, two winners, one finalist (right), and two highly commended practitioners (Jack Fenaughty and Peter Fullerton) were selected. Their contributions to seabird-friendly fishing include using effective bycatch-reduction techniques, and developing and testing new measures. Congratulations to all and keep up the great work!

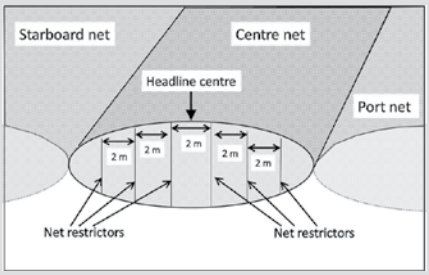
(L-R): Adam Clow (winner), Zac Olsen (winner) and Brian Kiddie (finalist) style up the Wellington waterfront. Photo: Lance Lawson for Southern Seabird Solutions.

WHAT'S UP?

A shout-out to Team Scampi

In May, the Ocean Guardian newsletter talked about a new idea to reduce seabird captures in the scampi fishery. New ideas need testing to see how they work out. This can only happen on fishing vessels at sea with industry support.

The 'net restrictor' is intended to reduce seabird captures in scampi trawl nets—the centre net of triple net rigs, to be precise. It's fabulously simple as well as cheap. Ropes across the mouth of the centre net limit the size of its opening. Hopefully, this will reduce numbers of seabirds entering the net. Testing restrictors involves following an experimental schedule that creates some extra work for crew. So, thanks for your patience and involvement, Team Scampi, while we find out what restrictors can do to reduce seabird bycatch.



WORD ON THE STREET

Un-fin-ished business

In February, the Ocean Guardian newsletter reviewed some national and international shark management measures. Since then, issues around shark utilisation and conservation have continued to progress rapidly. So what is the best way to ensure the future of these tricky customers?

What's the problem with sharks around the world?

In *Headline,* we learned that the oceanic whitetip was once one of the most abundant sharks in the open ocean. Now, it's considered vulnerable at a global level. This species has company—15 of 21 other oceanic shark and ray species are also globally at risk. Some of these are already protected in New Zealand waters, like white pointers. Others are managed through the QMS, such as blue shark, porbeagle, and mako shark. Sharks have that typical set of characteristics that makes animals vulnerable to overexploitation: they are large, they mature late, they don't breed often, they have naturally longer lifespans, and some are in high commercial demand.

What has happened recently?

Shark parts, including fins, are getting harder to move around. Since September this year, Cathay Pacific has refused to transport unsustainably harvested sharks and shark products. Cathay is based in Hong Kong, entry point to one of the key markets for shark fins worldwide. Other recent developments include the tightening of European Union regulations around landing and processing sharks. American Samoa banned shark fishing in its territorial waters in November, as well as prohibiting the sale, possession, and distribution of shark parts. Since early this month, all sharks have been legally protected in French Polynesian waters. This includes a ban on trade.

The basking shark: the world's second largest fish, as well as having one of the biggest mouths. *Photo: AP Photo, Nick Caloyianis, Massachusetts' Division of Marine Fisheries.*

So can sharks be fished sustainably?

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), a science-based barometer on sustainable fishing, thinks so. Two spiny dogfish fisheries have been certified by MSC, in Canada and the US. To gain MSC certification, fisheries must not deplete stocks. They must also allow for the maintenance of ecosystems, and have an effective management system in place.

When to ban and when to manage harvest?

Governments respond to shark issues in different ways. Sharks share the oceans with other fish that humans want to eat, and bycatch issues can complicate things. Bans require enforcement to be effective, and can drive catches underground. Spatial protection is an increasingly common approach, and can also benefit industries like tourism that make money out of live sharks. But, enforcement is also required for this type of measure to have any value. The long and the short of it is that there is no easy answer.

So how do New Zealand's protected sharks fare overseas?

Organisations like the WCPFC (see Headline) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) are one approach to coordinating management internationally. For example, species protected in New Zealand that must also be protected by the 117 parties signed up to the CMS include basking sharks and white pointers. This should make global management efforts more likely to succeed.

Funded through the Department of Conservation MIT2012-05

JPEC Ltd

WORLD WATCH

Taking action on NPOAs

In recent months, you may have heard about the 'NPOA', more precisely known as (take a breath … it's a mouthful!) the *Draft National Plan of Action to Reduce the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in New Zealand Fisheries* **(phew!). This plan describes New Zealand's proposed responses to the United Nations' calls for responsible management of seabird interactions with fisheries.**

But, that's not a new thing is it? That's right—our first NPOA was completed in 2004. Implementing that didn't go very well, and government has now rethought its approach. The current version focuses on awareness, mitigation, monitoring, research, and international cooperation where New Zealand seabirds are caught overseas. Commercial, recreational, and customary fisheries are all included as their fishing gear can capture protected seabirds. Continuous improvement is the name of the game.

Although it's called the National Plan of Action, it is part of a wider international move towards responsible fishing. Countries that have developed their own NPOAs include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, USA, and Uruguay. Some focus only on longline fisheries at this stage, but others (like New Zealand and South Africa) are more inclusive.

Gibson's albatross and Cape petrels are some of the subjects covered by the New Zealand NPOA. *Photo: J. Pierre.*

Although approaches to NPOAs vary between countries, common themes emerge. For example, legislation which covers seabirds and fisheries is often not straightforward. Canada has three legislative Acts that relate to fisheries management, and four that relate to seabirds. Similar to NZ, a number of NPOAs highlight gathering knowledge and determining bycatch risk as key issues. On the water, implementation of measures to reduce bycatch is typically achieved through a combination of education and enforcement. No-one has all the answers to seabird bycatch, but all NPOAs highlight the importance of international efforts to solve the problem.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- *Headline:* For more on oceanic whitetips and other fish, check the guide at: *http://fs.fish.govt.nz/Doc/22896/AEBR_69.pdf.ashx*
- *Your voice:* Read more about the Seabird SMART crew's achievements at: *http://www.southernseabirds.org/?id=2285&area=179&authKey=2285*
- *World watch:* If you haven't already read the draft NPOA-Seabirds for New Zealand check out: *http://www.fish.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/40F6398E-DAFD-407F-BEC9-D208D4337D0B/0/2012_21_draft_npoa_seabirds_consultation.pdf*. Other countries' NPOAs can be found at: *http://www.fao.org/fishery/ipoa-seabirds/npoa/en*

FEEDBACK

To submit feedback or questions, please email: bycatch.bylines@yahoo.com