

BYCATCH BYLINES

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HEADLINE

Seabirds safer in the South Pacific

On July 31, new requirements for the use of seabird bycatch reduction measures come into force in fisheries across the south Pacific. The measures apply to bottom longline and trawl fisheries managed by the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation. New Zealand knowledge has been vital for developing the new measures. How will our seabirds benefit?

The South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) is currently made up of 13 member countries who manage fisheries in the high seas of the south Pacific. This RFMO covers an area bigger than any other, making its commitment to seabird bycatch mitigation even more significant.

For bottom longline fisheries, the new requirements cover:

- A prohibition on discharge at shooting and hauling
- The use of bycatch reduction measures such as line-weighting, tori lines, and night-setting
- Observer coverage of 10% or more of the fishing fleet.

For trawl fisheries, the new requirements include:

- Use of tori lines or other mitigation to reduce cable strikes
- Best-practice measures for discharge management, including not discharging at shooting and hauling, and holding or batch discharging waste at other times
- The use of observer coverage to monitor seabird bycatch and help manage bycatch risk.

Ongoing reporting and review of information by SPRFMO Members are other components of the new package of measures. These will help ensure bycatch risks are managed effectively and using best-practice approaches over time.

Those familiar with New Zealand's mandatory requirements and best practice approaches for seabird bycatch reduction will notice a lot of similarities with the new SPRFMO measures. Given how close the SPRFMO area is to our waters, New Zealand seabirds often travel there. Therefore, our birds are certain to benefit from the implementation of the new regime.

To learn more about the new measures, follow the link in *Want to know more?*



Gibson's albatross – one of the New Zealand seabirds that occurs in the SPRFMO Convention Area. Photo: JJ Harrison, CC BY-SA 3.0

WHAT'S UP?

More on Māui

The Government's five-year research plan on the Māui dolphin is underway. Updating the population estimate is the first priority, with one of two seasons' work on this now completed. It's early days, but how is the estimate shaping up?

The work underway will update the 2010/11 estimate of 55 Māui dolphins aged 1+ years. Surveys have now been completed for 2015, and will continue in summer of 2016. Preliminary results show that the 48 samples collected in summer of 2015 represent 40 individual dolphins. Two-thirds of these were females. More analysis is being carried out and updates will be included in future newsletters.



Māui dolphins. Photo: DOC, CC BY-SA 3.0 NZ

WHAT THE FAQ?!

When black is white

Black corals are named for their dark-coloured skeletons. However on the outside, they can be different colours including white. What else do we know about these bottom-dwellers?



Black coral. Photo: NIWA

- About 58 species of black corals are known from New Zealand waters. All are legally protected.
- Black corals take on different colours because of the live polyps and associated tissues covering the dark coral skeleton.
- As well as being a variety of colours, black corals can be very different shapes. These corals can take fan, feather or whip-like forms. They may also look like small trees.
- Black corals can grow up to 3 m tall and live for hundreds of years.

Shanghai noon

New Zealand experts are working both here, and abroad, to promote the safety of our seabirds at sea. A workshop in Shanghai brought together Kiwi experts and Chinese colleagues to discuss seabird issues, including fisheries bycatch. What's the value of such activities to the management of New Zealand's seabirds?

Some Asian countries, such as China, are well-known for their large and far-flung fishing fleets. China's distant-water longline fleet currently numbers 350 vessels. The size of the fleet means that their use of seabird bycatch reduction measures is especially important. Earlier this year, three New Zealand seabird and fisheries bycatch experts were invited to Shanghai, to talk to government officials, fisheries observers and representatives of Chinese distant-water fishing companies. The group took part in a workshop held at Shanghai Ocean University that was designed to increase awareness of seabirds, their role in the environment and most importantly, how to reduce their bycatch in fisheries. While much of this is well-known to New Zealand fishermen, it was news to many workshop participants. For example, attendees were amazed at how long albatrosses can live and how far seabirds travel.

The Shanghai workshop was part of a Birdlife International initiative rolling out in a number of Asian countries. While it's early days, such efforts should bring benefits to New Zealand seabirds by raising awareness and reducing seabird deaths offshore.



The Chatham albatross – one of the New Zealand seabirds that may come across Chinese fishing vessels at sea. Photo: Danmantle, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The long and the short of it

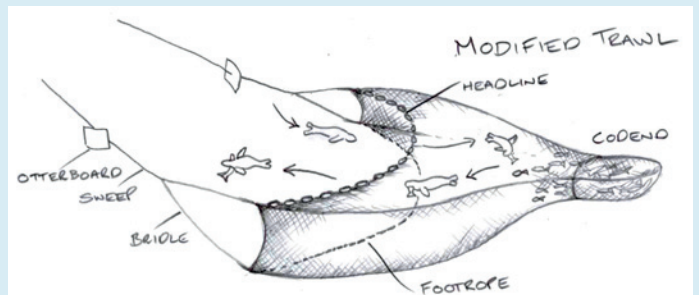
Way back in October 2012, Bycatch Bylines profiled an Australian project investigating whether shortening the cod ends of trawl nets reduced fur seal captures. The project is now complete. Is it a case of short is sweet for seal survival?

As in New Zealand, seals can be caught in trawl gear in some Australian fisheries. While there are some management measures intended to reduce this catch, the problem has not yet been solved. However, a few years back, fishermen in Australia's South East Trawl fishery had the innovative idea that fur seal captures might be lower if trawl nets were made as short as possible.

The idea arose from the crew being short on time. They started leaving the normal lengtheners out of their trawl in order to get fishing faster. They first observed that this modified trawl gear did not reduce their target catch. Then, over time, the crew thought that seal captures may be lower with the shorter gear. Recognising that this observation could be useful for addressing the seal bycatch problem, they took their idea to their industry body – the South East Trawl Fishing Association (SETFIA). Supported with funding from the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and ExxonMobil Australia, SETFIA initiated a project to test the short cod end idea.

Over 18 months, the trawl vessel participating in the project conducted more than 680 tows using either a 'short' cod end of 27 m or a 'long' cod end of 39 m. Nets were colour-coded and shooting was video-recorded automatically to confirm the type of net used for each tow. The fishing grounds during the project included areas off Tasmania's west coast, where seal interactions are particularly high.

Overall, the results show that the rate of fur seal interactions did not differ when the short and long cod ends were used. That's unfortunate, but the idea was well worth testing properly. After all, a clear answer is much better than no answer at all. For now, it's back to the drawing board on seal bycatch reduction, until the next new idea comes along.



A sketch of the modified trawl net design showing the shorter cod end. Unfortunately, it was not a case of short is sweet for seals.

Image: A. Dunsmore © 2012 South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association

WORD ON THE STREET

Sustainability is the new black

The New Zealand Seafood Industry Conference 2015 comes to Wellington in August. Sustainability is the word of the day, with a focus on what's good for business – adding value.

The Conference hosts a diverse group of speakers from economists through scientists and CEOs. Topics include fisheries management, product traceability, international markets and more. It's a heady line-up that is bound to lead to excellent discussion at coffee time.

More information is available online:
www.seafoodconference.org.nz/programme/

New Zealand 
sustainable seafood
ADDING VALUE

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- *Headline*: Find out more about the SPRFMO measures in force from July 31 at: <http://tinyurl.com/onqnot9>
- *What the FAQ?:* NIWA has produced a free coral identification guide. It's online at: <http://tinyurl.com/pa4h84q>

FEEDBACK

To submit feedback or questions, please email: jpecnz@gmail.com

Banner image: DOC/MPI