
BACKGROUND

The southern blue whiting fishery is a bulk fishery focused on highly aggregated fish and in a region renowned for hostile weather and hence difficult operating conditions. Safety of vessels and crew is paramount.

The already significant value of this fishery has been further enhanced by achieving MSC certification for the Bounty, Campbell and Pukaki fisheries. This certification has been achieved but it is important that everybody involved in the fishery remains aware of the issues that are of concern to the auditors of the fishery. Particular action is required through the Certification process, regarding the environmental effects of fishing.

In particular these concerns relate to the level of interactions with:

- NZ sea lions (Campbell fishery)
- NZ fur seals (particularly at the Bounty fishery) and
- Seabird interactions –these are less than most other deepwater fisheries but constant vigilance is required especially given recent increasing trend in captures.

As a consequence, DWG and managers would like to remind vessel owners and operators that focusing on the reduction in the level of protected species interactions that occur during the southern blue whiting season is important. Last season (2013) the fleet caught 21 sea lions (17 dead, 4 released alive) and this is a major setback in risk management of this species given the big reduction in captures in the previous year.

DWG and managers would therefore like to highlight the strategies available that are likely to help the fishery reduce the current level of interactions, therefore reducing the risk of additional management being required. Each of the fisheries issues are dealt with in detail below but the main actions for risk reduction for 2014 will be:

- Full use of certified SLEDs in Campbell fishery
- Excellent offal management (both deliberate discharge and factory deck wash)
- Full and careful adherence with DWG - MMOP and VMPs
- Rapid reporting and communication when required

CAMPBELL ISLAND NEW ZEALAND SEA LIONS

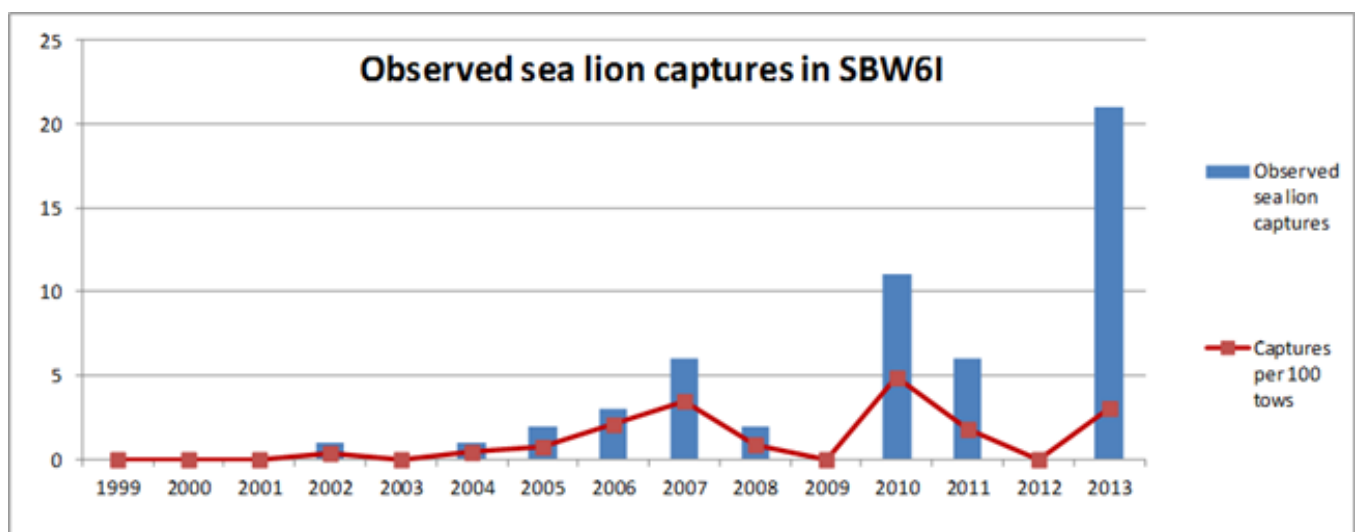
Key Points

- The NZ sea lion is listed with a threat classification of Nationally Critical by DOC and is a species about which the community is expressing concern
 - DOC and MPI are undertaking the drafting of a Threat Management Plan process for NZ sea lions over the next 12-18 months
 - More recent understanding of the effects of disease on this species at the Auckland Islands, and considering it is likely that this is a part of the equation for Campbell's sea lions conservation management, adds weight to the concerns of managers
 - Of ongoing concern is the rising trend in captures, especially since around 2007 (see Fig 1) and more especially given the large number of interactions observed again last year similar to estimated captures in 2010
 - The events last season significantly raised the profile, in a very negative way, of the Campbell fishery in the minds of MSC auditors, Government officials, eNGOs and politicians
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- Since last season there has been significant discussion and analysis of the causes that may have led to the abrupt change in captures over the last 2 years (none observed in 2012, 21 in 2013).
- What we now believe is that sea lion behaviour is variable and that when they are present in large numbers and feeding aggressively from trawl nets the risk is very high. Due to this we rely on the standard processes set out in the DWG MMOP to reduce risk but this year we have also agreed that all vessels will deploy certified SLEDs at all times in the Campbell SBW fishery

Actions

- All vessels carry and deploy SLEDs in Campbell fishery
- Further, the DWG MMOP describes that best practice to further reduce risk is to keep the time gear is on the surface to an ABSOLUTE MINIMUM and not shoot the gear when large numbers of animals are surrounding the vessel. Any practices that lead to interruptions in shooting and hauling (poorly maintained gear, excessive catches etc) greatly increase risk
- The DWG MMOP also highlights the importance of managing offal discharge and how this may help reduce the number of marine mammals (and certainly seabirds) that are attracted to the vessel (it may be that livers and roe lost from the processing deck are particularly attractive). It is paramount that all vessels continue to closely follow offal management procedures detailed in their VMPs.
- “Soaking” catch may increase risk as sea lions can dive to 500 meters. Any practice or incident which eventuates in increased time the gear is in the water or on the surface will generally increase risk
- If full 180o turns back through the fish mark must be undertaken then the gear should be kept as deep as possible (i.e. 400-500 m or below); don't do doors up turns in this fishery despite the MMOP supporting these in general (SBW is deeper water than SQU and JMA).
- Noting this is a bulk fishery, vessels must operate good fishing practice that does all possible to ensure that significant volumes of fish are not lost from the net, this means ensuring windows are used for vessel and gear safety and not catch control; use your catch sensors
- Immediate reporting of all NZ sea lion captures to DWG is critical (trigger limit report – each and every sea lion reported ASAP ‘within 24hrs’) so that a fleet overview of risk and interaction levels can be maintained in real time; when in doubt report; carry a digital camera to assist identification



(Figure 1) Observed NZ sea lion captures in SBW fisheries; source MPI 2014

BOUNTY ISLAND NEW ZEALAND FUR SEALS

Key points

- The catch rate of NZ fur seals in this fishery is amongst the highest of any fishery in NZ
- Risk appears greatest at the start of the season, when fur seals are most aggressive and prepared to take bigger risks for a “free feed”
- Also at the start of the season, fewer vessels are on the fishing grounds attracting greater numbers of fur seals
- As with NZ sea lions, everything should be done to adhere to the MMOP as this is the most effective set of mitigation measures a vessel can apply
- Report triggers in 24 hours

BOUNTY ISLAND NEW ZEALAND SEA BIRDS

Key Points

- Captures of seabirds in this fishery, whilst historically low, are increasing (Figure 2 below) and of particular concern is the increase in Salvin’s mollymawks captures as this species is Very High Risk in the MPI Risk Assessment and recently listed as Nationally Critical by DOC due to population decline; it nests almost entirely on the Bounty Islands arriving there in August from outside the zone to commence breeding
- In order to improve performance of the fishery in these fisheries, vessels should keep more strict watch on offal management (in particular) mitigation device maintenance, and adherence to VMPs. Report trigger breaches within 24 hours.

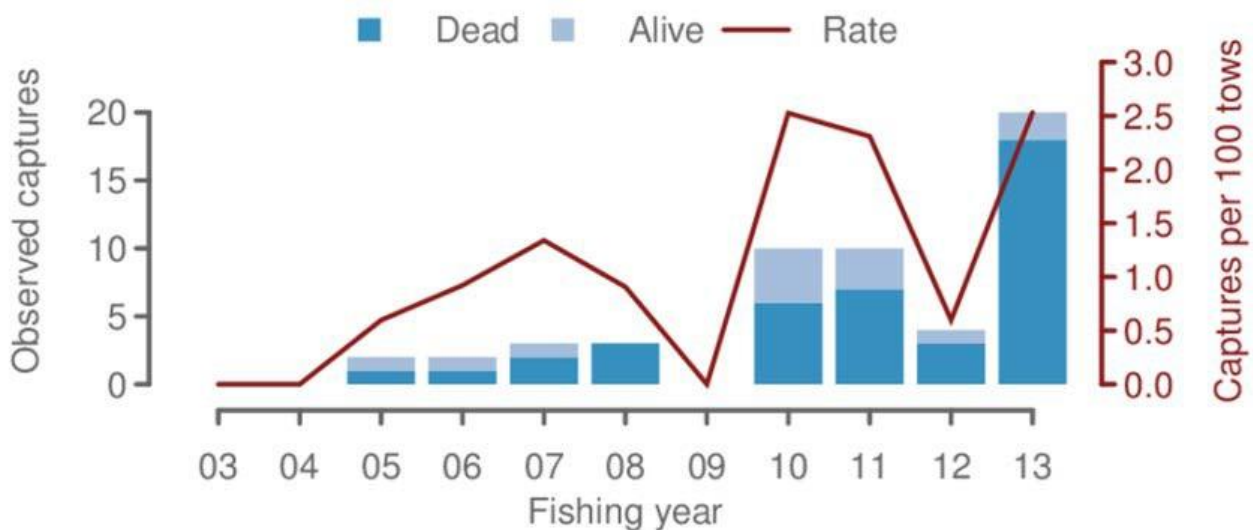


Figure 2) Observed seabird captures in SBW fisheries; source MPI 2014

For more information or questions please contact Richard Wells or John Cleal.