

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



**OPERATIONAL PLAN TO MANAGE THE INCIDENTAL CAPTURE OF NEW
ZEALAND SEA LIONS IN THE 2015 SOUTHERN BLUE WHITING FISHERY at
CAMPBELL ISLAND (SBW6I)**

August 2015

PURPOSE

- 1 This Operational Plan sets out the operational measures that vessels which target southern blue whiting in the Campbell Island fishery (SBW6I) will employ during the 2015 season to manage interactions with New Zealand sea lions (sea lions).
- 2 This Plan also details the additional monitoring that MPI observers will undertake in support of these operational measures and to inform the future management of sea lion interactions in this fishery.
- 3 Following an unprecedented number of interactions with sea lions during the 2013 fishing season in SBW6I, some additional operational measures have been developed that the fleet will adhere to during the 2015 season.
- 4 These measures apply in addition to agreed industry requirements and guidelines specified in both Vessel Management Plans (VMPs) and the Marine Mammal Operational Procedures (MMOP).
- 5 The measures specified in this document have been agreed with the Deepwater Group Ltd (DWG), the organisation that represents southern blue whiting quota owners.
- 6 These operational measures will give effect to the operational objectives in the Southern Blue Whiting fishery specific chapter of the National Deepwater Fisheries Plan, including:
 - a. **Operational Objective 1.1:** Support the southern blue whiting fishery in achieving and maintain credible third party certification and ensure any Conditions of Certification are met within the required timeframe
 - b. **Operational Objective 2.2:** Ensure that incidental New Zealand sea lion mortalities, in the southern blue whiting fishery at the Campbell Islands (SBW6I), do not impact the long term viability of the sea lion population and that captures are minimised through good operational practices.

OPERATIONAL MEASURES

- 7 The additional operational measures detailed in this Plan were developed following a review of the information collected during the 2013 season, and after implementing the plan in the 2014 season.
- 8 Three categories of operational measures will apply in the 2015 SBW6I season:
 - a. Information gathering by MPI's Observer Programme;
 - b. Real-time communication between vessels, DWG and MPI; and
 - c. Additional mitigation measures that aim to minimise risk of sea lion capture and any potential adverse effects on the Campbell Island population.

Information gathering

- 9 At least one MPI Observer will be placed on each vessel that operates in SBW6I during the 2015 season.
- 10 MPI Observers will undertake an additional marine mammal abundance count each day. This count will take place in addition to the first count (which is taken during the first day light haul as standard practice) and will be taken during a daylight tow. This count aims to detect any variation in the numbers of marine mammals that attend vessels during the course of a fishing event.

- 11 In addition to standard ID and biological sampling (sex, lengths, tissue samples, and photos) observers will aim to take a tooth sample from each captured sea lion.
- 12 Observers will also monitor the operation of Sea Lion Exclusion Devices (SLEDs) in the fishery, specifically:
 - a. Any issues with crew safety; and
 - b. The behaviour of the SLED in trawl net.
- 13 Observers will also pay particular attention to monitoring each vessel's adherence to the guidelines specified in the VMP and MMOP.

Additional mitigation measures

- 14 SLEDs will be used on every tow in SBW6I during 2015.
- 15 All SLEDs will be audited on shore before the season commences, to ensure they meet the agreed SLED specifications (attached).
- 16 Each SLED will be measured at the beginning of the season by the MPI Observer on board for the first SBW6I trip in 2015.
- 17 SLED damage: If at any point during the season the observer or crew have reason to consider a SLED has been damaged, its use will be discontinued until the SLED measurements have been re-checked by the Observer. If the observer is CONFIDENT that the SLED still meets the specifications, its use can be continued. If the observer has ANY DOUBT about whether the SLED meets the specifications, the measurements will be sent as soon as is practical to the MPI Observer Programme for verification by the MPI Deepwater Fisheries Management team. Use of the SLED can resume if and when measurements are verified.
- 18 All vessels will pay particular attention to ensuring they abide by the guidelines within both their VMP and the MMOP.
- 19 MPI has also been informed that industry have developed a series of sea lion trigger points, including a limit that if reached will prompt the fleet to leave the fishery for the year. **Monitoring by MPI observers will assess progress towards these capture trigger points and limits.**

Communication

- 20 Each vessel that operates in SBW6I will communicate daily with DWG representatives.
- 21 Observers will include sea lion abundance counts in the standard weekly reporting regime.
- 22 Each vessel will have its own digital camera on board to ensure photos of any incidental captures can be sent emailed for identification purposes.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THIS PLAN

- 23 This Operational Plan will commence at the onset of the 2015 SBW6I season and will be reviewed at the end of that season. The review will incorporate the information collected by MPI Observers, the industry and will aim to determine which aspects of the Operational Plan can be removed, changed, or should continue to be incorporated in the management of sea lion interactions in this fishery.
- 24 In April 2014, the Minister of Conservation and the Minister for Primary Industries announced the development of a Threat Management Plan for New Zealand sea lions. Once the TMP has been finalised and agreed, it will be used to inform the future management of fisheries interactions with sea lions, including measures taken in SBW6I.