
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 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. In 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. Subsequently the introduction of SLEDs and other measures in 2014 saw a reduction in captures to 2 sea lions (with full observer coverage).

DWG would therefore like to highlight the strategies required reduce the current level of interactions.

Each of the fisheries issues are dealt with in detail below but the main actions for risk reduction for 2015 will continue to be:

- Full use of certified SLEDs in Campbell fishery and a hard limit agreed by industry where all fishing will stop if **25** sea lions (or **12** females) are caught; any individual vessel capturing 5 animals (and resulting in mortalities) will leave the fishery
- Excellent offal management (both deliberate discharge and factory deck wash)
- Full and careful adherence with DWG - MMOP and VMPs
- Rapid incident reporting when required and daily communication re SLED use and all captures of marine mammals –fur seal or sea lion (presence/absence)

Campbell Island New Zealand Sea Lions

Key Points

- The NZ sea lion is listed with a threat classification of Nationally Critical by DOC and recently upgraded by IUCN to endangered.
- DOC and MPI are finalising a Threat Management Plan process for NZ sea lions over the next 12 months. A pup count survey undertaken by DWG and MPI this summer showed a very similar number of pups born as in 2010 but at the time of completion of the survey over half of these pups were dead due to the difficult conditions at the rookeries and possibly disease
- Of continued concern is the rising trend in captures, especially since around 2007 (see Fig 1) and more especially given the large number of interactions observed in 2013. Full introduction of SLEDs resulted in much reduced captures (2 only with full observer coverage) in 2014.

Actions Required

- All vessels are familiar with this briefing note and its requirements and the MPI Operational Plan for SBW 6I Campbells).
- All vessels carry and deploy SLEDs in Campbell fishery for all tows. We recommend that vessels carry a minimum of two and preferably three SLEDs as contingency against irreparable damage
- Reporting: All vessels report daily to admin@deepwatergroup.org the following:
 - full SLED use (yes/no)
 - marine mammal captures (yes/no)
- 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 of capturing a marine mammal and must be avoided
- 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. Last year it was observed that marine mammals and particularly sea lions are attracted to livers and roe lost from the processing deck. 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 metres. If you intend to soak your catch it is recommended that you do this away from the main fish aggregation and keep the net as deep as possible, however it is best to avoid this practice. Any practice or incident which eventuates in increased time the gear is unnecessarily in the water or on the surface will increase risk
- If full 180° turns back through the fish mark must be undertaken (and they should in general practice be avoided) then the gear should be kept as deep as possible (i.e. 400-500 m or below); do not execute “doors up” turns in this fishery despite the MMOP supporting these in general (SBW is in deeper water than SQU and JMA).
- Vessels must operate good fishing practice that does everything possible to ensure that significant volumes of fish are not lost from the net, this means ensuring windows are used only for vessel and gear safety and not catch control; use your catch sensors to manage catch
- Immediate reporting of all NZ sea lion captures to DWG is critical (trigger report – each and every sea lion reported ASAP) so that a fleet overview of interactions can be maintained in real time. Ensure the vessel has a digital camera to assist identification (emailing pictures on request from DWG)

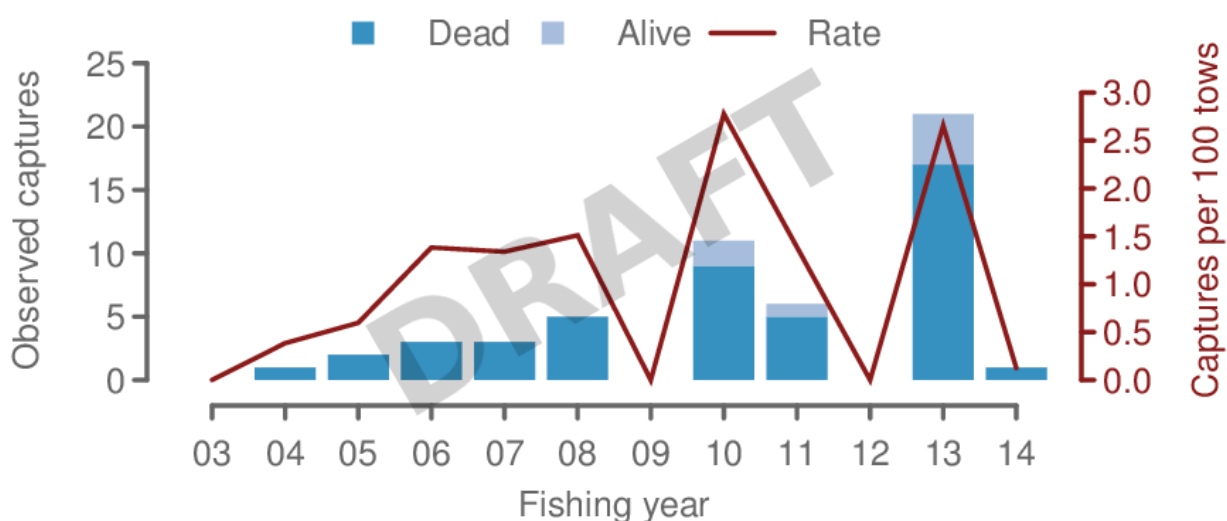


Figure 1 Observed NZ sea lion captures in SBW fisheries; source MPI 2015

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 immediately

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 mollymawk captures as this species is Very High Risk in the MPI Risk Assessment and recently listed as Nationally Critical by DOC due to apparent 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.

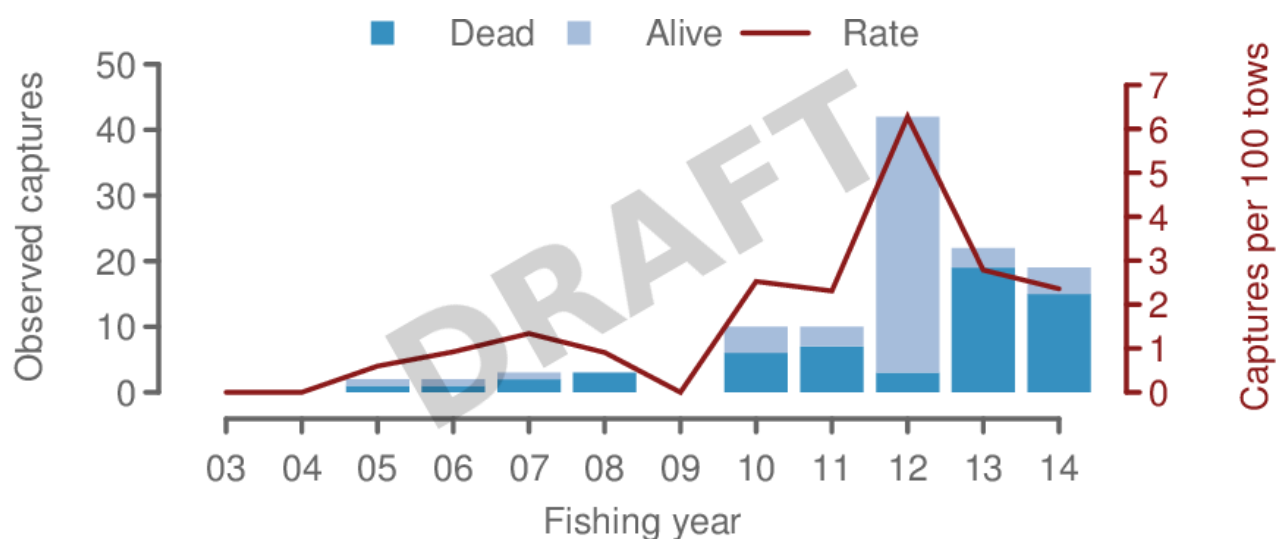


Figure 2 Observed seabird captures in SBW fisheries; source MPI 2015

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