
Background

The Southern blue whiting fishery (SBW6I) is a bulk fishery focused on highly aggregated fish in a region renowned for hostile weather and difficult operating conditions. Hence, the safety of vessels and crew is paramount.

The certification by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) of this fishery has enhanced the already significant value of the Bounty Island and Campbell Island SBW fisheries. It is critical that all involved in the SBW fisheries remain aware of the key issues that are of concern to the MSC auditors. In particular, action is required regarding the environmental effects of fishing. DWG and MPI remind vessel owners and operators that focusing on the reduction in the level of protected seabird and marine mammal species interactions that occur during the southern blue whiting season is crucial.

MSC concerns relate to the level of interactions with:

- NZ sea lions (Campbell Island fishery)
- NZ fur seals (particularly at the Bounty Island fishery) and
- seabird interactions (although these are lower than most other deepwater fisheries - constant vigilance is required especially given the recent increasing trend in seabird captures and the particular species involved).

In 2013, the SBW6I fleet caught 21 sea lions (17 dead, 4 released alive). This was a setback in the risk management of this species, especially given the large reduction in marine mammal captures the previous year. Subsequently the introduction of SLEDs along with full observer coverage in 2014, and again in 2015, has delivered a significant reduction in captures of sea lions.

Here are the fleet and individual vessel actions required to manage and reduce the risk of high levels of interactions.

The main risk management actions for the 2016 SBW fishing season are still:

- Full use of certified SLEDs in the Campbell Island fishery only
- A fleet-wide hard limit agreed by industry where all fishing will stop if **25** sea lions (or **12** females) are killed;
- A vessel-specific limit where any individual vessel killing 5 animals will result in immediate consideration (meeting if need be) by all operators, and if deemed necessary quotaowners, to agree remedial actions agreed necessary
- Notification by DWG to all operators of all sea lion captures and mortalities along with vessel(s) responsible and any relevant information regarding the nature of the capture especially any information that advises on possible cause
- Excellent offal management regarding deliberate discharge and factory deck wash to be practised
- Absolute adherence with DWG – MMOP (marine mammal) and VMPs (seabird) to be observed
- Immediate incident reporting and daily communication (re SLED use and all captures of marine mammals – NZ fur seal or NZ sea lion (presence/absence))
- Accurate and prompt photo ID and communication to confirm species if required

Each of the issues with these fisheries are dealt with in more detail below.

Campbell Island New Zealand Sea Lions

Key Points

- The NZ sea lion is listed with a threat classification of Nationally Critical by DOC.
- DOC and MPI are consulting a draft Threat Management Plan for NZ sea lions timed for completion by late 2016. Of concern was the rising trend in sea lion captures since 2007 (see Fig. 1) especially given the large number of interactions observed in 2013. The introduction of SLEDs fleet-wide resulted in a reduction of captures 2 in 2014 and 4 in 2015 (100% observer coverage both years).

Actions Required

- Ensure all vessels and vessel/fleet managers have read and understood this briefing note and its requirements, and the 2016 Operational Plan for SBW 6I.
- That all vessels carry and deploy SLEDs in the Campbell Island 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)
 - Any marine mammal captures? (yes/no)
 - If yes, how many animals?
 - What species?
- 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 correctly managing offal discharge(s) and how this helps to reduce the number of marine mammals and seabirds that are attracted to the vessel. Of particular concern are the livers and roe lost from the processing deck. It is paramount that all vessels continue to closely follow their offal management procedures detailed in their VMPs.
- “Soaking” catch may increase risk as sea lions can dive to 500 metres. If you must soak your catch it is recommended that you do this well away from the main fish aggregation and keep the net as deep in the water as possible, however it is best to avoid this practice altogether. Any practice or incident which eventuates in increased time the gear is unnecessarily in the water or on the surface will increase risk and is not to be encouraged.
- 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. 400-500m or below); and 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; and to use your catch sensors to manage each 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. Please ensure the vessel has a digital camera to assist identification (emailing pictures to DWG).

Captures of New Zealand sea lion in southern blue whiting trawl fisheries

Observed captures

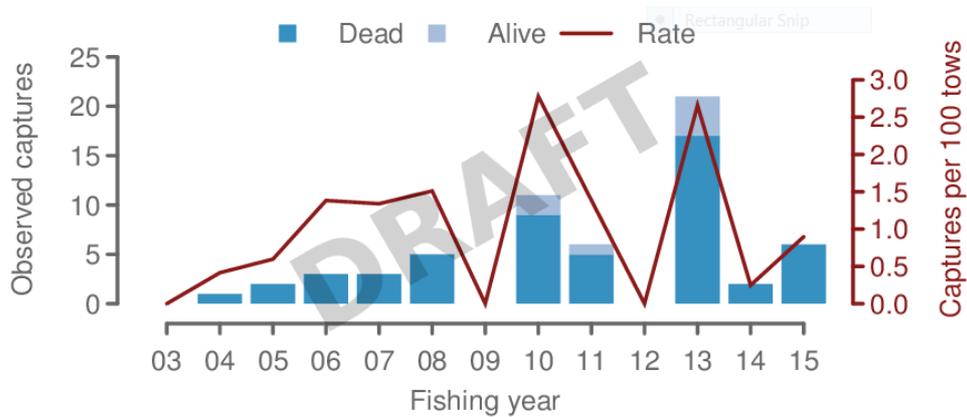


Figure 1 Observed NZ sea lion captures in SBW 61 Campbell fishery: source MPI 2016 (unpublished and provisional).

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 New Zealand
- Risk appears greatest at the start of the season, when fur seals are most aggressive and prepared to take bigger risks to feed from catch
- At the start of the season, fewer vessels are on the fishing grounds and therefore attracting proportionately higher numbers of fur seals to each vessel
- 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 marine mammal triggers to DWG immediately

Bounty Island New Zealand Sea Birds

Key Points

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

Captures of all birds in southern blue whiting trawl fisheries

Estimated captures

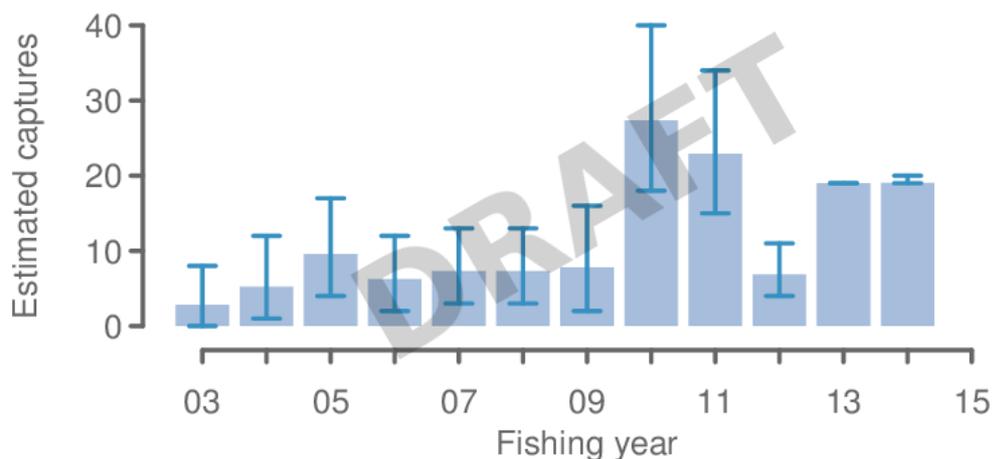


Figure 2 Estimated total seabird captures in SBW fisheries; source MPI 2016 (unpublished and provisional).

For more information, please contact:

Richard Wells richard@resourcewise.co.nz Ph. 021 457 123 or

John Cleal john.fvms@xtra.co.nz Ph. 021 305 825.

For ALL reporting, photos and triggers **ALWAYS** use: admin@deepwater.org as this relays immediately to both Richard and John.