

Deepwater Group Environmental Liaison Officer (ELO) Report for the 2019-20 Fishing Year

Background

In the past several years Deepwater Group (DWG) has expanded its delivery of documented standards (Operational Procedures - OPs) to a much larger and more diverse range of vessels. Ling bottom longline, scampi and coastal hoki vessels now bring into the programme many smaller vessels with mostly owner/operators and many without fully adequate systems or management structures to fully manage mitigation and risk systems to DWG OP-required levels.

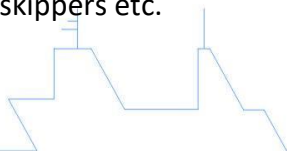
Due to increased emphasis on meeting the objectives of the new NPOA – Seabirds, ongoing concern regarding sea lions, the Government and the public asking for a reduction in protected species captures and for ongoing continuous improvement of fishing industry practices, there is now even more need to ensure all vessel operators maintain a consistent and diligent approach to our OPs.

Overall Objectives of DWG's ELO Programme

- Visit at least 90% the deepwater fleet of trawl (including fresher, factory, and seasonal hoki) vessels and all scampi and ling longline vessels.
- To train senior crew and vessel managers of deepwater group fleet, deepwater trawlers, hoki coastal trawl, scampi trawl and ling longline vessels.
- Promote best practice mitigation standard practices across the fleet and review the DWG standards set out within the OPs.
- Audit Vessel Management Plans (VMPs) and best practice environmental and mitigation practices.
- Encourage improvement and effectiveness of fish waste control and mitigation device use and improve real-time reporting of the capture event.

Annual Objectives

- Organise and deliver environmental training resources to the senior crew and associated managers. Target all SQU, JMA and SBW fleet for pre-season briefings.
- Monitor deepwater vessel operators' adherence to agreed environmental risk OPs.
- Maintain a fleet database of deepwater vessels, operators, target species, ports, skippers etc.



- Undertake port calls and vessel visits to a minimum of 90% of the fleet.
- Analyse all Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) audits of VMPs and OPs, contacting operators with feedback for each audit.
- Provide expert advice on vessel-specific options for fish waste management and warp mitigation systems and ensure this is documented.
- For SQU and SBW seasons, ensure the full fleet adheres to SLED audit programme:
 - Maintain an updated database of all SLEDs
 - Provide FNZ with a summary of all SLED certifications
 - Monitor in-season SLED damage, repairs and re-certification
- Maintain strong liaison with government – particularly with FNZ, DOC and DOC's Inshore Liaison Officer Programme.
- Review VMPs, ensuring each vessel has an effective vessel-specific seabird risk management programme.
- Review and revise VMPs on scampi and hoki fresh fish fleet.
- Provide full induction into DWG programmes to new skippers and/or vessel operators who have moved to new fisheries or have started on new vessels.
- Support reviews and re-drafts of any OPs that require renewal.
- Produce an end-of-year summary report to DWG, FNZ and DOC.

DWG Fleet (Vessels Targeting DWG Fish Stocks)

- 33 deepwater trawlers (> 28m) vessels – OPs and VMPs
 - 26 factory trawlers
 - 7 fresh fish
- 14 fresh fish hoki trawl (< 28m) Coastal Hoki – Coastal Hoki OP and RMPs
- 10 scampi vessels – Scampi OP and VMP
- 31 BLL (target FMA 2-8) – BLL OP
 - 7 auto line
 - 18 hand-bait (land > 4 tonnes)
 - 6 hand-bait (target and land 2 to 4 tonnes)

Total number of vessels: 88

COVID-19 Affected the Programme

From March to August I did not travel anywhere outside Tasman Bay, making it very difficult to visit my normal number of vessels. However, I had already visited the bulk of the SQU fleet between November and January. Others I did by phone.

Pre-SBW season, the few I could get to locally were visited with the rest/majority done by phone (however the FNZ Audit of the fleet was very good so the process worked). All foreign-owned (or foreign-crewed) vessels were covered by visit or phone call, or I briefed the manager who passed the information on. Lockdown meant no crew changes so the effect of not having face-to-face meetings and new crews was mitigated. It was even more important this year as many of the foreign crew vessels still have summer crew fishing their first winter season/SBW season.

Deliverables & Outputs

ELO Vessel Visits (including phone briefings)

(Table of vessel names and dates visited attached)

	Vessel numbers	Vessel visited	Not visited
Factory vessels	26	24	2
Fresh >28m	7	5	2
Fresh <28m	14	10	4
Scampi	10	7	3
Ling (auto line NZ)	7	5	2
Ling hand bait (+4T)	18	15	3
Ling hand bait (+2T)	6	4	2
Total fleet	88	70	18
% of fleet visited		81%	

Note, 28 of the 70 vessels visited, were visited at least twice during the year

Triggers

This year there were **35** protected species capture trigger-point events. Follow-up and communications occurred, most often on the same day, with vessel management or directly with the skipper.

Occasionally, with more serious capture events, contact is made with the vessel owner and/or quota-permit holder to discuss issues and how further captures might impact on the quota owner or vessel owner. This needs to happen in real-time as events are unfolding. After the event, corrective actions are carried out and changes made to VMPs and/or DWG OPs as required.

All capture event information plus any additional information requested from the vessel or MPI observer services is logged. On completion, a summary of events is recorded for DWG and FNZ.

Trigger information and feedback is used to inform OP reviews and rewrites.

VMP / MMOP Observer Reviews

Analyse all FNZ audits of VMPs, MMOPs and OPs, contacting vessel operators with feedback for each audit as required. At times this requires follow-up with MPI observer services and/or advice to be given to vessel operators or changes to be made to VMP/RMP etc.

- **157** observer review forms were assessed, and summary/feedback reports sent to each vessel operator.
- Information on vessel voyage, list of any protected species captures, comment on offal control and mitigation is all recorded for each voyage and recorded into a summary sheet for DWG and FNZ.
 - 18 reviews (11.5%) had follow-up activity, mostly minor
 - 7 of those 18 reviews (4.5%) required more serious actions and response by DWG and the operator, corrected actions were required as vessel didn't meet some of the more important aspects of the VMP

Note, MPI will also review all VMP reviews and will separately advise how many required further action/follow up etc. Their review may well differ from mine..!

Positive outcomes

SQU and SBW Fishery

Excellent results this year with just one HSL capture (male and released alive) in SBW fishery and nil in the SQU fishery with 100% adherence with SLEDs checks by observers and fishery officers and giving MPI the required pre-departure port notices for observer coverage placement.

SLED Pre-season Audit

100 SLED checks undertaken and approved for use for the SQU and SBW fleets. This involves monitoring of the SLED checks and confirmation/approval to vessel operators and FNZ that each SLED meets specification and is ready for use (i.e. check every check-sheet issued by the approved net-sheds).

All SLEDs were recorded into a summary sheet for DWG and FNZ. Also, SLEDs damaged or which became out of spec, I approved based on information from the vessel (SLED with minor damage repaired onboard) or I asked that it was removed and repaired during next port call. This was all recorded for MPI.

There were no specification adherence failures with SLEDs not meeting standards reported by FNZ observers or fisheries officers who checked them.

JMA Fishery and Common Dolphin (CDD) Captures

Another year with very low dolphin captures in JMA 7, with three CDD taken by a domestic trawler. *Over the past five years, we have had only six CDD captures in total.*

With high levels of observer coverage and with the positive comments from observer services, the BATM fleet has been one of the best - or the best - performer as far as day-in-day-out adherence to our VMPs and other DWG OPs and showing the results here.

H&G Vessels and SQU Fishery

H&G vessels in the SQU fishery have in the past had high capture rates, and often multiple capture events. In recent seasons the H&G fleet has made huge improvements. Parts of the H&G fleet (2 vessels) have had remarkable results this season with seabird captures of only 0.015 birds per 100 tows.

We are using this to understand their improvement and pass this on to the rest of the fleet. It is a sign of change that in the past these outlier or standout vessels (for all the wrong reasons) are now having great results.

The risk now seems spread through the whole fleet, so understanding improvements and better results may tell us more than always just chasing 'one-off' capture events...

I have just completed these vessels' yearly SQU season briefings. Not so long ago, high numbers of seabird captures in the SQU fishery often was a concern and a major focus of each briefing. This year, two vessels completing about 470 tows between January and May, with 100% observer coverage, combined only had 4 seabird captures (one vessel only one bird which was released alive).

Hoki 'Factory' Fleet and Warp Captures (Salvin's Albatross)

For the past five years, we've been working on reducing the risk of warp strikes/captures of our deepwater highest risk bird, the Salvin's Albatross. The rate is coming down and we are starting to get a much better understanding of risks. Skippers are carrying out 'real-time' fish waste mitigation procedures to minimize particular risks to this bird.

Scampi Fleet

The third year of marked improvement around protected species risk reduction and adherence to VMP standards:

- Mostly positive feedback from observers
- Reduced seabird 'trigger' capture-events
 - A big reduction in net captures, with no 'big' multiple capture events
 - We seem to have the whole fleet very aware of the importance of VMP and following procedures
 - One sea lion (HSL) capture this year (self-reported)

Summary of Performance and/or Issues During the Year

- Hoki 'factory' fleet - no issues although always questions about Hoki OP requirements
- SQU and SBW fisheries - no issues and no dead sea lions; very high observer coverage and good results are a credit to the diligence of these fleets (extra SQU tows meant higher bird captures number this season only because of the extra effort tow/bird rate was OK)
- Scampi fleet - much more consistent, adherence to best practice standards is more aligned across the fleet, there is still a bit work to do, only because this fishery covers so many high risk protected species and so many FMAs
- Coastal 'hoki season' fleet - reporting needs to improve, especially reporting fur seals (compared to a few years ago) though adherence to DWG procedures is good, we generally have the same skippers each year (which is very good) making it easier to manage
- BLL/Ling - a combination of many vessels with contract skippers, often skippers change vessels regularly (compared to our other smaller vessel fisheries) making it difficult to get uptake of information.
 - Reporting appears to me still not good enough and MPI Compliance have started communicating with companies that appear out of synch with other vessels
 - Once we get new BLL Regulations, we will move from the current OP to new vessel-specific Risk Management Plans (like the rest of the trawl fleet)
- Our biggest multi captures event (involving multiple trigger-points) involved two auto liners in the FMA 6 ling fishery. While both vessels were actively communicating and managing as best they could (as noted by the one observer involved) the final tally of white-chinned petrel captures resulted in FNZ proposing stiffer regulations in this area. It shows that ongoing capture events to levels which perhaps 10 years ago would have been thought of as "OK", are no longer acceptable. Just because things are not as bad as they were 15-20 years ago, it is no longer acceptable to stay in the same area for days (no matter how well mitigation and management are performing), taking multiple captures and ongoing triggers. This requires a different management approach! When we do vessel-specific risk plans we can address this type of situation.
- Basking shark - 7 captures last year and 12 this year, becoming more regular trigger events, mitigation is difficult and challenging. At times we can have multiple single capture events in a localized area. To date, our trigger systems are working well and we've been managing these captures in real-time.
- New skippers for our smaller to mid-range boats - skippers changing 2 or 3 times per year is a big issue. ELO briefs one, then a few months later there's a new skipper who has no idea of our OPs or RMP etc.
 - We need ACE providers & vessel owners to take more responsibility and ensure the vessel operator/skipper has a current RMP/VMP and has made contact with ELO before sailing.

- Every ACE agreement should have the requirement for the vessel operator to seek ELO briefing, have RMP re-assessed, before fishing their ACE.
- We need vessel owners who contract skippers to advise us each time they contract a new skipper and seek ELO briefing.

Until this happens the ELO is always “behind the eight-ball”. Vessels change target species, fishing methods, or skippers (sometimes all at once). A new skipper in a new fishery on their first trip carrying an MPI observer (it happens...) is a recipe for disaster. It’s only been by luck that we haven’t had a major event. Again BLL is most of this risk!

Focus This Year 2020-21

- Increase awareness and importance of vessels reporting all captures, particularly with coastal trawl and BLL fleet
- See all scampi vessels this year, I missed (30%) of the smaller operators last year
- BLL along with the issue around new proposed regulations, much work will be needed to get this fleet fishing to meet any new Regulations and NPOA standards.
 - I need to travel to these vessels (phone calls won’t cut it). These vessels are spread all over New Zealand with a third of the fleet based on Napier, Wellington, and Gisborne. At present there is good money in the ling fishery, so more boats are switching to BLL/Ling, so this is where our increased risk lies right now. I expect to have to travel more to North Island ports...
 - As highlighted above, we need those who own vessels or provide ACE to do more, we can’t do it for them forever!

John Cleal

FV Management Services Ltd

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[John Cleal | Deepwater Group | Environmental Liaison Officer | Report 10 Nov 2020](#)