



Performance of the 2019 Southern Blue Whiting Fishery and Compliance with the SBW6I Operational Plan

Monitoring of Operational Plan Requirements

The Fisheries New Zealand '2019 Operational Plan to Manage the Incidental Capture of New Zealand Sea Lions in the Southern Blue Whiting Fishery at Campbell Island (SBW6I),' sets out the operational measures that vessels employed to manage interactions with New Zealand sea lions (sea lions). The Operational Plan also details the additional monitoring that Fisheries New Zealand Observers undertook in support of these operational measures.

Performance against each operational measure is set out below:

Information Gathering

- At least one Fisheries New Zealand Observer will be placed on each vessel that operates in SBW6I during the 2019 season.*
 - 14 vessels participated in the SBW6I fishery during 2019 (10 vessels participated in 2018). All vessels carried at least one Fisheries New Zealand Observer while operating in the SBW6I fishery in 2019 (100% coverage).
- Fisheries New Zealand Observers will undertake a minimum of one marine mammal abundance count each day. This count is taken during the first daylight haul as standard practice. Counts were not undertaken if light was poor (or at night); it was too foggy or snowing hard; or marine mammals were too distant from viewing point.*

Results

- The 2019 SBW6I season comprised 19 trips in total by 14 different vessels (five vessels conducted two trips each).
 - New Zealand sea lions were observed on every trip but not on every tow.
 - Observers noted that New Zealand sea lions were regularly encountered in the Campbell Island Rise area (SBW6I), usually arriving during hauling, and then swimming alongside the net and occasionally pulling fish from the mesh while the net was on the surface.
 - The average number of sea lions observed during the daily count was 2.6.
 - Counts ranged from 0 to 20 sea lions counted.
 - At times observers noted that from the Bridge of the vessel it was difficult to determine whether animals observed were sea lions (HSL) or fur seals (FUR).
- 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.*

- No sea lions were captured in 2019.
4. *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 the trawl net*
 - Observers did not report any issues with either crew safety or the behaviour of the SLED in the trawl net.
 5. *Observers will also closely monitor each vessel's adherence to the guidelines specified in the VMP and MMOP.*
 - Observers noted that the level of adherence with VMPs and the MMOPs on the 19 observed trips was excellent, there was no need for follow up actions in 2019.

Additional mitigation measures

6. *SLEDs will be used in every tow in SBW6I during 2019 and vessels will carry at least one spare SLED on board.*
 - Observers reported that SLEDs were used in every tow during the 2019 SBW6I season and vessels carried one or two spare SLEDs.
7. *All SLEDs will be audited on shore before the season commences, to ensure they meet the agreed SLED specifications.*
 - Based on information provided to Fisheries New Zealand by Deepwater Group Ltd (DWG), all SLEDs on vessels that participated in the 2019 SBW6I season were audited prior to the start of the SBW6I season and met the agreed SLED specifications.
8. *Each SLED will be measured at the beginning of the season by the Fisheries New Zealand Observer on board for the first SBW6I trip in 2019.*
 - Observers checked and measured SLED specifications before they were used for the first time, all SLEDs met the specifications in 2019.

9. *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.*

- No SLEDs were damaged badly enough to warrant repairs in 2019.

10. *The Operational Plan contains sea lion trigger points, including a limit that if reached will prompt the fleet to leave the fishery for the year. Monitoring by Fisheries New Zealand Observers will assess progress towards these capture trigger points and limits. Industry have a voluntary limit that if reached will prompt the fleet to leave the fishery for the year:*

- i. a limit of 12 female sea lion mortalities or*
- ii. 25 total sea lion mortalities*

- No sea lions were caught in 2019

11. *Vessel operators must provide the Fisheries New Zealand Observer Programme with 5 days' notice by email prior to the vessel leaving port for each fishing trip where the vessel intends to operate in SBW6I (whether for all or part of the trip).*

- The Fisheries New Zealand Observer Programme were provided with 5 days' notice for all 19 trips in SBW6I in 2019.