

Deepwater Group Environmental Liaison Officer (ELO) Report for 2020-21 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, more recently increasing awareness of protected sharks and benthic concerns and with the Government and 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) and all scampi and ling longline vessels.
- To train senior crew and vessel managers
- Promote best practice mitigation standards 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.
- Be on call 7 days a week to respond to any multiple or trigger capture event reported by DWG vessels and reply immediately to gather further information and offer advice

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) Observer 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.

2020-21 DWG Fleet (Vessels Targeting DWG Fish Stocks)

- 32 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
- 30 BLL (target FMA 2-8) – BLL OP
 - 6 auto line
 - 18 hand-bait (land > 4 tonnes)
 - 6 hand-bait (target and land 2 to 4 tonnes)

Total number of vessels: 87

COVID-19 Affected the Programme Delivery

COVID travel restrictions and in particular North Island travel was suspended for most of this year, making it very difficult to visit my normal number of vessels, this mainly affected NI Ling fleet. However, within SI, I could get to most ports unobstructed but at times some bigger companies would restrict access to factory ships based on the risk at the time! Often travel & MIQ restrictions of foreign crew also made it difficult to do as many vessel-visits as usual

Most of the SQU fleet were visited between November and January, all JV vessels were physically visited, and most domestic vessels were visited but about 20% I did by phone. Pre-SBW season, the few I could get to locally (Port Nelson) were visited with the rest/majority done by phone (note the FNZ Audit of the fleet's performance to all requirements was very good so the process worked).

Other issues around program delivery

Both Nino's Ltd (Wellington) and Eastern Fishing (Napier) tied up large numbers of vessels, then proceeded to sell-off a lot of vessels many of which were BLL/LIN vessels, so at times up to 15%-20% of BLL/ling fleet were tied up for extended periods and several for the whole year.

We also had new MPI BLL Regulations come into force; we were planning to write all-new vessel specific RMPs for the BLL fleet this year, (this fleet hadn't had RMPs previously) but instead thought better to wait until new Regs were released before commencing drafting the RMPs.

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	25	1
Fresh >28m	7	5	2
Fresh <28m	14	12	2
Scampi	10	8	2
Ling (auto line NZ)	6 (2 not active)	4*	2*
Ling hand bait (+4T)	24 (6 not active)	17*	7*
Total fleet	87	71	16
% of fleet visited		82%	

Notes:

- 25 of the 87 vessels visited, were visited at least twice during the year
- *6 of the BLL hand bait boats were tied-up all year and 2 of the Auto liners
- **Percentage of all active vessels visited (Covid-/contacted & briefed) was 91%**

Triggers

This year there were 30 protected species capture trigger-point events. Trigger events have been dropping year on year, more importantly numbers of captures within a Trigger event has been dropping significantly.

Summary of Trigger events:

- Seabird - 9 triggers events
 - *This is low & over past 5 years seabird triggers have been reducing significantly as we reduce numbers of bigger multiple capture events*
- Fur-seals - 6 events
- Dolphin - 2 events (but one was 5 CDD other was 6 CDD
 - *One JMA tow, had 5 (alive) captures and were all released alive, the 6 (dead) captures again in one tow, was Coastal Hoki boat in CS*
- Sea Lions- 9 events 5 for SQU & 4 events in SBW
- Basking sharks - 4 event (*this is down on the previous few years*)

Follow-up and communications occurred, most often on same day or within 24 hrs, 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 vessel briefings, 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.

- **150** 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.
 - 15 reviews (10%) had follow-up activity, mostly minor, about half of these were errors /mistakes completing the form or the MPI observer misunderstanding of the vessel risk management systems or the DWG standards

- 4 of those 15 reviews (3% of all reviews) 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.

Positive outcomes

SQU and SBW Fishery

Excellent results again this year with adherence to Fisheries NZ Sea lion Operational Plan and DWG OPs, trigger reporting and 100% adherence with SLED checks completed by fishery officers and observers and 100% for pre-departure port notices for observer coverage placement.

Mixed results with HSL (sea lion) captures this year, capture numbers slightly above average, with 5 in SQU fishery and 4 in the SBW fishery. Much lower BSK captures this year with 4, (3 of these were SQU tows) with many less captures recorded at the Snares compared with last 2 seasons, likewise great -white shark captures numbers were less than previous years as well.

SLED Pre-season Audit

98 SLED checks undertaken, and SLEDs approved and registered with FNZ 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 SLED check-sheet issued by the approved net-sheds). All SLEDs were recorded into a summary sheet for DWG and FNZ. 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

A year with 5 dolphins captures in JMA 7 by a domestic trawler (this issue was reviewed, and some further mitigation proposed). 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 by 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 of seabirds. In recent seasons the Korean H&G fleet has made huge improvements. Some of the Korean vessels have recorded only 2 or 3 birds per 100 tows (anything under 10 is acceptable) since 2018 these vessels mince/pump-discharge all fish waste (prior to this the vessel were holding & batch discharging) the change to mincing appears to us to have had had huge effect on the capture rates!

We are using this to understand their improvement and pass this on to the rest of the fleet.

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

For the past seven 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 risks to this bird. However, we expect to be more focussed non this going forward

Scampi Fleet

Another good year, mostly positive feedback from observers, reduced seabird 'trigger' capture-events, A reduction in net captures, with no 'big' multiple capture events. While we have all of the fleet very aware of the importance of VMP and following procedures, still couple operators which need to tighten up on mitigation, and particularly around warp captures! Two sea lions (HSL) capture this year (one was self-reported)

Summary of Performance and/or Issues during the Year

- Hoki 'factory' fleet - no issues, although always questions about Hoki (HMA's)
- SQU and SBW fisheries - no issues, though a few more HSL captures than we'd like but seabird numbers for the SQU season were well down, very high observer coverage and good results are a credit to the diligence of these fleets (extra SQU tows give the lower seabird capture rate even more meaning! More effort, less birds, a very good outcome!)
- 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 (but is improving compared to a few years ago) 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 – this is still by far our biggest risk area, and has only become worse with the introduction of new BLL Mitigation Regulations, with newly required sink rates (which must be completed, and records kept on ongoing basis) and tori line performance, which for many will be difficult to meet, still a-long way to go before this BLL fleet is anywhere near the standard (across the board) of all our other fleets
 - 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. This year we had may vessels tied-up, then sold off, and few retired from BLL fishing, this also means new owners, and lot more work to get new operators up to standard
 - Reporting appears to me to be still not good enough
 - The introduction of the new BLL Regulations, means lot extra work for next year to try get these vessels up to meet the standards and with MPI focusing

on the new sink rate targets, many vessels will need to make significant changes to way they set the gear and with more observer coverage planned this means this fleet will be under the microscope over next 12 months!

- Basking shark - 4 captures this year, is a good result as in the previous few years we have had multiple vessel 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 the 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. Once again BLL is most of this risk!

Focus This Year 2021-22

- Bedding in the new BLL regulations across the ling fleet, working with each vessel to help them meet new 5m depth sink depth standards.
 - ensure vessel skippers awareness and importance of vessels reporting all captures, particularly with coastal trawl and BLL fleet
 - As highlighted above, we need those who own vessels or provide ACE to do more we can't do it for them forever!
- Benthic OP, raising importance of reducing Benthic catch volumes, staying clear of know high volume areas the new ORH /MSC measures, increasing crew ID standards, and improving reporting, bedding in new Coral Trigger and Pause tow requirements
- Review HOK fleet on Chatham Rise for Salvin's captures
- Improve LFR communication and contracting arrangements

Regards John

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