

Deepwater Group Environmental Liaison Officer (ELO) Report for 2022-23 Fishing Year

Background

Over 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 manage mitigation and risk systems to levels required by the DWG OPs.

Due to increased emphasis on meeting the objectives of the NPOA – Seabirds (2020) ongoing concern regarding sea lions, increasing awareness of protected sharks and benthic concerns and with the increasing Government and public pressure for reducing protected species interactions, 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% of the deepwater trawl fleet (including fresher, factory, and seasonal hoki), and all scampi and ling bottom 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
 - 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.

2022-23 DWG Fleet (Vessels Targeting DWG Fish Stocks)

- 30 deepwater trawlers (> 28m) vessels – OPs and VMPs
 - 25 factory trawlers
 - 4 fresh fish & 2 *tied-up (full-time)*
- 12 fresh fish hoki trawl (< 28m) Coastal Hoki – Coastal Hoki OP and RMPs
- 10 scampi vessels – Scampi OP and VMP
- 22 BLL (target FMA 2-8) – BLL OP
 - 4 auto line (2 *others permanently tied up*)
 - 12 hand-bait (land > 4 tonnes) & 2 *others tied up*.
 - 6 hand-bait (target and land 2 to 4 tonnes) & 3 *others tied up*.
- 6 Ling Potting boats.

Total number of vessels: 80 (and 7 currently tied up for various reasons)

Deliverables & Outputs Table 1: ELO Vessel Visits (including phone briefings)

	Vessel numbers	Vessel Contacted	No-Contact
Factory vessels	25	24	1
Fresh >28m	4	3	1
Fresh <28m	12	12	0
Scampi	10	8	2
Ling (auto line NZ)	4	4	0
Ling hand bait (+4T)	19	15	4
Potting	6	3	3
Total fleet	80	69	11
% of fleet visited		86%	14%

Notes:

- 24 of the 80 vessels visited, were visited at least twice during the year
- another 7 DWG Vessels (mostly BLL) were tied-up all year
- the scampi fleet & BLL are difficult to visit in port being spread out all over NZ, So some were done via phone/briefings. Hence lower coverage across these vessels!

Triggers

This year there were 30 protected species capture trigger-point events. This is a decrease over past years, mainly high number of fur seal multiple capture events in the Cook Strait & Pegasus hoki fishery.

Summary of Trigger events:

- Seabird - 5 trigger events
 - Very low seabird trigger events, one was deck strike event of 40 birds/prions in Southern Ocean, rest were all minor capture events.
- Fur-seals - 13 trigger events
 - Mostly from Cook Strait hoki fishery and was approx. Well down on last years, lot extra effort was placed into Cook straight fleet to try reduce seal captures this season!
- Dolphin - 5 trigger events (*total number Dolphins captures down on last year*)
 - one was an alive ORCA tangled on BLL set when hauling) 3 x CDD & 1 x Dusky
- Sea Lions- 4 trigger events
 - Two in SBW, and two in SQU 6T fishery
- Basking sharks - 3 trigger events relieved 1 alive & 2 dead

Follow-up and communications occurred, most often on the same day or within 24 hrs, with vessel management or directly with the skipper. Occasionally, with more serious capture events, contact was made with the vessel owner and/or quota-permit holder to discuss issues and how further captures might impact the quota owner or vessel owner. The conversation and responses happen swiftly, often while 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 are 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.

- 134 observer review forms were assessed, and summary/feedback reports were sent to each vessel operator. The number of observer reviews is slightly down on previous years.
- While there were fewer observer reviews completed, some of the factory vessels' observer reviews were for two, three or even four trips at a time, (three to four months on some vessels). Observers were staying longer onboard some vessels doing multiple trips (rather than travelling from boat to boat or home and being redeployed).
- Information on each vessel voyage, with a 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.
 - 19 reviews (about 14%) had follow-up activity, mostly minor, about half of these were errors/mistakes in completing the form or the MPI observer misunderstanding of the vessel risk management systems or the DWG standards.
 - 3 of those 19 reviews (about 2% of all reviews) required more follow-up action and response by DWG and the operator, corrective actions were required as vessel didn't meet some of the more important aspects of the VMP.

Note: *FNZ will also review all VMP observer reviews and will separately advise how many required further action/follow up etc.*

Positive outcomes

SBW and SQU 6T fisheries (sea lions)

- Excellent results again this year with adherence to the FNZ Sea lion Operational Plan and DWG OPs. Trigger reporting was completed where necessary, there was 100% adherence with SLED checks completed by fishery officers and observers, and 100% for pre-departure port notices for observer coverage placement.
- There were two (2) sea lion captures in squid season and two (2) in SBW this year, which is down on the last few years' averages.

SLED Pre-season Audit

For squid season, there were 72 SLED checks & check sheets issued pre-season. 10 of these SLEDs were damaged and repaired and re-checked during the season. In the SBW season another 26 SLEDs had pre-season checks.

All SLED check sheets approved for use for the SQU and SBW fleets. All meet the Sled legal requirements when checked by fishery offices and or observers

JMA Fisher, Common Dolphin (CDD) Captures

The BATM fleet has performed well in the JMA fishery this year and in recent years. Observer audit reviews have shown high adherence to the VMPS and Marine Mammal OP. The BATM fleet had only one (1) capture this season.

Seabird Captures in the SQU Fishery

The squid fishery had the lowest total seabird numbers recorded since we went to near 100% observer coverage (8 years-ago)

A significant component of this was the reduced number of white-chinned petrels caught. One driver for the reduction in numbers is likely due to changes in fishing distribution in recent years, with more effort on the Chatham Rise. This area is significantly further away from the breeding/foraging area of white-chinned petrels and the bird assemblages and behaviour are likely to be different.

Scampi Fleet

Feedback from observers was largely positive, however, there are still a couple of operators which still need to tighten up on seabird mitigation and fish waste management, particularly for warp captures. There were reduced protected species triggers from the scampi fleet this year and reduced overall seabird capture numbers.

Summary of performance and/or issues during the year

Hoki fleet & warp capture of Salvin's & Bullers albatrosses.

- For the past 8 years, DWG has been working on reducing the risk of warp strikes/captures of the Salvin's & Bullers albatross, (deepwater's highest-risk birds). 2020/21 there was a 'spike' in the number of Salvin's caught. It is unknown what the driver of this may have been, as adherence to VMPs and OPs has been very high in recent years.
- DWG introduced additional measures to reduce the risk to Salvin's and Bullers & other mollymawk species. A seasonal seabird mitigation plan for the high-risk period (1 Sept to 30 Jan) was written for each vessel in the hoki fillet fleet. The Plan does increase awareness of seabird risk using a 'look-think-act' approach and outlines additional mitigation use during the summer months. In particular, the Plan emphasises the need for management procedures around the discharge of SWA fish waste as this is considered a significant attraction for the birds.
- This year we had a slight reducing in captures, DWG is closely monitoring all Salvin's & Bullers captures each week over the spring and early summer period.

Hoki Cook Strait, Fishery (plus 28m factory & 'Coastal' fresher fleet)

- The Cook Strait and the Pegasus Canyon hoki fisheries had a better year with far less multiple capture events of fur seals (13 triggers). Also of concern are the captures of common dolphin (Cook Strait areas) and dusky dolphins (Pegasus area)
 - One larger vessel in the CS fleet did carry out net-binding at all times during the season, to try and reduce the risk of seal captures

SQU and SBW fisheries

- No issues. Overall capture numbers of mammals, sharks & seabirds all down on past years.

BLL/Ling

- The ling BLL fleet is still a- way off aligning with the standards (constantly /across the board). The introduction of the new BLL Circular (2021), has resulted in the whole fleet needing to rethink their approach to setting bottom longlines. The new regulations require vessels to sink their slowest sinking hook to a depth of 5m within the aerial extent of the tori line. Many operators are finding this difficult to meet.
- A small percent of our BLL fleet set the gear at 2kn to 2.5kn, making it very difficult to achieve the mandatory 50m aerial extent/constantly, the slower you set the harder it is to maintain suitable drag to keep the tori line in the air, but this is offset with much better sink-rates when setting slower
- Likewise setting for Blue Nose, skippers add a lot more flotation to the gear when setting of BNSs, making it impossible to achieve the regulated sink rate requirements! We need to take issue with some parts of the new BLL Regs.

- There are also more BBL/Ling vessels that have or are switching to potting this year and more are likely to follow.
- Reporting appears to be still not good enough

There are still some issues with the uptake of our standards in our smaller BLL and to a lesser extent our hoki coastal trawl vessels. Skippers and boat ownership often change, making it difficult to get uptake of information. This year we had many vessels tied up, then sold off, and a few retired from BLL fishing. This also means new owners, and a lot more work to get new operators up to standard.

Focus This Year 2022/23

- bedding in the new BLL regulations across the ling fleet, working with each vessel to help them meet new 5m depth sink depth standards.
- Raising the importance of reducing benthic catch volumes, and staying clear of known high-volume areas. Working with senior crew to establish new ORH/MSC measures, increasing crew ID standards and improving reporting in the new coral trigger and pause tow requirements.
- Visit all scampi trawlers.
- Review the HOK fleet on the Chatham Rise for captures numbers of Salvin's,/Bullers to check how new Measures and VMPs for the hoki fillet fleet are trending.
- Set up a series of meeting with skippers etc, to work through the hauling procedures for trawlers. Establish when and if they can close off the loose netting/meshes at stern quarter when hauling, to try and reduce risk of net captures.
- Meetings with Hoki Cook Strait operators and work through issues and set up new fur seal mitigation measures for that fishery.
- Work with DWG to ensure any changes to the OPs are fit for purpose and assist with the transition of the OP manual to a digital format on vessels.

Regards John

John Cleal, DWG ELO