

SQU 6T Operational Requirements for Sea Lions 2024-26



Background

Seafood New Zealand | Deepwater Council (DWC) and Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) have worked closely together to monitor and manage the Auckland Island squid (SQU 6T) fishery and vessels' interactions with the New Zealand sea lion for decades. Since the early 2000s, the SQU 6T fishery has been proactively managed by Deepwater Group, with the development of SLEDs and other mitigation measures driving progress in the environmental performance of the fishery.

The SQU 6T fishery has demonstrated exceptional performance over the years with consistently low sea lion captures. This exceptional performance with respect to a marked reduction in interaction rates with sea lions is verified with high rates of observer coverage.

In 2024, the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries removed the Fisheries Related Mortality Limit (FRML) for sea lions in SQU 6T as it is considered no longer necessary. This, along with the regulation of SLEDs in the fishery has removed the need for a government Operational Plan.

To demonstrate the industry's continued commitment to transparency, reporting and global best practice with respect to protected species, the following Operational Requirements are to be implemented by vessels operating in the SQU 6T fishery:

- Transparency
- Communication
- Protected species management
- Industry review of sea lion capture trigger levels.

Management Procedures

Preseason briefings

Before fishing in SQU 6T, captains and senior crew will be familiar with these procedures, noting the following:

- Before the squid season, all vessels and their crew will be briefed on Marine Mammal Operational Procedures and these specific requirements either by the DWC Liaison Officer or by the vessel manager.
- Before each trip, senior crew will conduct a pre-departure checklist through the Deepwater Info Portal and send an acknowledgement to shore staff.
- All information relevant to the SQU 6T fishery (and all other deepwater fisheries) is available in the Deepwater Info Portal and will be accessible to senior crew members.

SLEDs

SLEDs are a regulatory requirement in SQU 6T. Operators will need to ensure that vessels comply with SLED use and SLED specification as legally required ([Fisheries and the New Zealand sea lion | NZ Government \(mpi.govt.nz\)](#))

DWC requirements

Further to the regulatory requirements, vessels operating in the SQU 6T fishery will:

- Certify all SLEDs before the SQU season commences or as early in the fishing year as possible.
- Carry a minimum of two SLEDs (for vessels intent on fishing SQU 6T).
- Notify their shore manager immediately should their SLED become damaged.
- Notify DWC of any at-sea transfers of SLEDs, including vessel names and SLED IDs.
- Leave SQU 6T immediately should circumstances mean they no longer have a SLED on board that is certain to pass an inspection and meet the mandatory specification (i.e., both or all their SLEDs are badly damaged).

Entry to and activity in the fishery

Observer notification

Observer coverage has been essential for verifying the good performance and management of the SQU 6T fishery over the years. The following is noted:

- Observer coverage is determined through the observer sea-day plan, which has set a target of 70% observer coverage in SQU 6T for 2024-25.
- To assist with observer placement, vessels will notify FNZ of their intent and likelihood to fish in SQU 6T, 72 hours before leaving port (not including Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays).

Activity

- Operators will monitor all of their vessels' activities daily so that effort and catches are well-managed, and interactions with sea lions (if any) are reported in alignment with these procedures.

Triggers and response

Vessel triggers

- The fleet will continue to use the Marine Mammal Operational Procedures (MMOP) trigger level of one sea lion capture at which point they are required to complete the sea lion capture reporting form and report immediately to DWC (admin@deepwatergroup.org) and their vessel manager.
- Captures of sea lions will be promptly reported to the DWC Environmental Liaison Officer and vessel managers as a matter of course with photos to identify the animal (as per MMOP).
- The captain will attempt to understand factors that may have led to the capture, including discussing the event with the observer (if onboard). The vessel will consider any remedial action and implement necessary actions as outlined in the MMOP. The Environmental Liaison Officer will provide appropriate advice for any further action.
- Information on sea lion capture events will be reported by DWC to all operators of the fishery. Details of this may include:
 - Vessel name
 - Time and date
 - Location
 - Information on the animal
 - Any other relevant information

Fleet triggers

- In the event of the squid fleet reaching a level of **five** captures (observed or unobserved), SQU 6T operators that are involved in the fishery will meet (video or in person) to discuss the fleet trigger and any options to prevent further captures.
- Further actions will be agreed by operators and FNZ will be advised.

Transparency

For fleet-wide transparency and to enable collective decision-making, DWC will continue to advise all operators of any information relevant from FNZ updates regarding the performance of the fishery and observed sea lion captures.

DWC will remain in communication with FNZ through the duration of the squid season in alignment with our commitment to transparent reporting and best practice.

Contact

If you require more information, please contact Ben Steele-Mortimer on 027 234 3140 or bensm@southswell.co.nz

SQU 6T Operational Requirements Agreement

Date:

To: Seafood New Zealand | Deepwater Council

From: (Vessel Operator)

Contact Person:

Address:

Email:

The Vessel Operator

1. Confirms that they have read and understood the Operational Requirements.
2. Agrees to be a party to the Agreement and adhere to the outlined procedures above.
3. Acknowledges that they will become a party to the Agreement on delivery of this signed form to DWC.
4. Acknowledges that this is a two-year agreement, but this may be reviewed after one year if agreed by SQU 6T Quota Owners.

Signed: