

 <p>Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels</p>	<p>Ninth Meeting of the Seabird Bycatch Working Group <i>Florianópolis, Brazil, 6 - 8 May 2019</i></p> <p>Seabird Smart Assurance Scheme</p> <p><i>Janice Molloy, Southern Seabird Solutions Trust</i></p>
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SUMMARY

This paper outlines an approach developed in New Zealand to improve public transparency around mitigation use in fisheries. A Seabird Smart Assurance Scheme was designed to pilot in a New Zealand longline fishery, with the aim of improving or maintaining mitigation use, and publicly acknowledging the fishers and companies who participate. While the scheme was not implemented, this approach may be worth considering for fisheries where there is public interest in seabird captures.

1. BACKGROUND

Black petrels are ranked as the seabird species facing the highest risk from commercial fishing in the New Zealand EEZ (Richard et al 2017). This species overlaps with a range of longline and trawl fisheries in the north - eastern waters of New Zealand. In 2014, Southern Seabird Solutions Trust formed a stakeholder group called the Black Petrel Working Group, whose aim is to ensure both black petrels and fishing thrive alongside each other. The group includes local and central government, fishing companies, fishers, iwi, and environmental NGOs. Since the formation of the group, stakeholders have carried out a range of projects, including trialling electronic monitoring as a tool for monitoring seabird captures, satellite tracking of young black petrels, training fishers in seabird smart fishing, and involving fishers in black petrel monitoring.

2. STAKEHOLDER DRIVERS

As with any stakeholder group, each party has a particular set of needs that they hope to meet by working together. The common objective across all members of the Black Petrel Working Group is to reduce the numbers of black petrels and other seabirds being caught during fishing, and help recover the population. As well, fishing industry representatives want to be acknowledged publicly for their efforts by the environmental NGOs represented on the Working Group.

3. ACKNOWLEDGING FISHERS AND COMPANIES EFFORTS

Positive media releases, articles, social media and other types of publicity are short lived in terms of the impact they have on public opinion. To this end, the Black petrel Working Group received philanthropic funding to investigate the feasibility of establishing a pilot Seabird Smart Assurance Scheme, with the aim of acknowledging the efforts of longline fishers and companies in a more enduring way. The intention of the scheme was to establish a set of agreed, seabird related performance standards that fishers and companies meet, and to provide public recognition for participants in the scheme.

4. SCHEME DETAILS

The design of the scheme was modelled on an existing land-based scheme used by beef farmers under public scrutiny to reduce pollution of an iconic New Zealand lake (see <https://www.taupobeef.co.nz>). This beef scheme built a public facing publicity campaign around an existing monitoring programme. Initially the intention of the beef scheme was simply to shift negative public perceptions about the farmers involved, but over time, the brand has built a strong reputation and now rewards the farmers with a premium price for their product.

In the same way, the Seabird Smart Assurance Scheme was designed to build on existing programmes of work wherever possible, to reduce costs. There was no expectation that fish would receive a premium price, at least in the early years.

Details relating to scope of the pilot scheme, performance standards, performance monitoring, response to non-adherence to standards, levels of data transparency, governance, administration, on line presence, and communications were scoped out. The performance standards that were agreed to are shown below:

1. Vessel owners must be willing to be monitored using human observers and cameras
2. A technical specialist must carry out a sea trip on each vessel to work with the skipper to define mitigation measure specifications that meet government's 'best practice' standards
3. Each vessel must carry a Protected Species Vessel Management Plan that describes these specifications. The plan must be adhered to at all times
4. The skipper must adhere to a set of defined responses to seabird triggers and these are outlined in the Protected Species Vessel Management Plan
5. The skipper must have attended seabird smart training
6. The fishery must have achieved a level of monitoring that allows reliable seabird capture estimates to be made
7. Fishing company policies must reinforce the measures above and encourage vessels that fish for them to be part of the scheme.

5. OUTCOME OF THE SCHEME FEASIBILITY STUDY

Ultimately the decision was not to proceed with the Seabird Smart Assurance Scheme. A number of government policies changed during the feasibility study, most notably, a decision to postpone a full roll out of cameras across all New Zealand fisheries. Stakeholders are continuing to work together, with a focus on improving transparency through a multi-year reporting dashboard, and further trials of cameras as a monitoring tool for seabird captures.

Meanwhile the assurance scheme template is well developed, and may be applicable in other fisheries where there is community, public or supply chain interest in the impact on seabirds. Seabird assurance schemes could be considered amongst the approaches ACAP is discussing in its work to improve uptake of mitigation measures in the world's fisheries.

Reference

Richard, Y., Abraham, E. R., & Berkenbusch, K. (2017). Assessment of the risk of commercial fisheries to New Zealand seabirds, 2006–07 to 2014–15. New Zealand Aquatic Environment and Biodiversity Report No. 191. 133 p.