

BYCATCH BYLINES

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HEADLINE



Bettering the baffler

In the last issue, we talked about how to improve streamer lines to reduce seabird strikes on trawl warps. This month, we take a look at bafflers. There are many designs that meet the legal requirements. But how many of these actually reduce seabird catch?

Since April 2006, the use of 'seabird scaring devices' has been legally required on trawlers > 28 m in length. Bafflers are one of the options, and the only device that has the advantage of being 'set and forget'—they can be deployed at the start of a trip, and left out till the end. This makes bafflers appealing, but they are not as effective as streamer lines in reducing seabird strikes on trawl warps. While the legal specification allows for two or more booms, it makes sense that two booms protect warps less effectively than four. So what's a responsible operator to do?

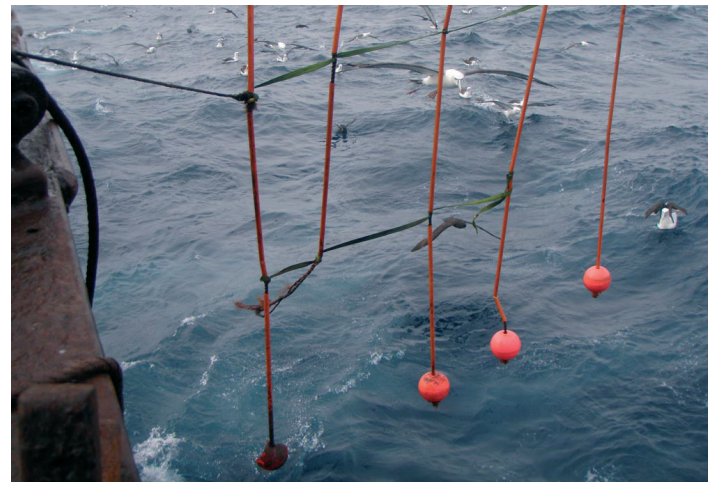
First, if you're using a baffler, get it protecting as much of the warp area as possible. This means having decent side and stern booms, and 'curtaining off' the box the booms create with droppers that go as close to the sea surface as possible. It makes sense—keep birds out, and keep warps in, as much as you can.

Second, using materials such as hard plastic pipe droppers and plastic tubing over ropes reduces tangling as well as wear and tear. We know bafflers aren't cheap, but they'll be more cost effective if they're built to last.

Third, consider using a lazy line to link droppers to the vessel. This should reduce movement and tangling.

For the latest info on baffler designs, contact john.fvms@xtra.co.nz.

At the moment, there is one vessel trying a new type of baffler at sea. The new design builds on the strengths of the *San Waitaki's* 'Burka' baffler (oops, that's not very politically correct!) and is expected to address some of the performance issues of current bafflers. The design drawings for the new and better baffler are available online (see 'Want to know more?'). It still might not be as effective as tori lines, but it's expected to be better than some bafflers in use now. It's also legal, set and forget, and you can whip out your new and improved tori lines when the going gets tough.

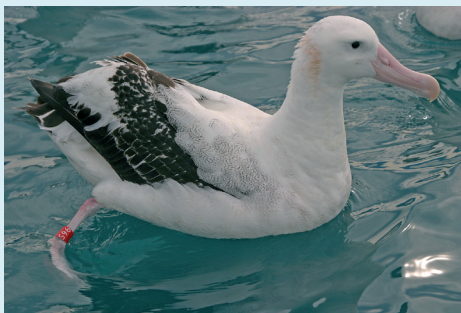


A variety of designs meet the legal specs, but bafflers can be made better. How would you improve this one? Photo: DOC/MPI.

YOUR VOICE

Birds with bling

Ever come across a bird with some bling? Researchers have been using leg bands on birds for decades. Bands are one way scientists can find out where birds go, what they do, and how old they are. Your sighting is valuable, and can easily be reported. For seabirds,



Bustin' out the bling, albatross style. Photo: Albatross Encounter Kaikoura.

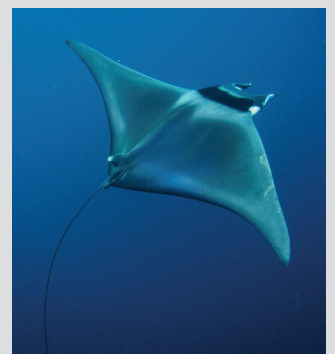
go to: <http://www.doc.govt.nz/non-gamebird-band-report-form> You'll need to know the band colour, the number if visible, the leg the band is on, and the date and place of your sighting. And it's not a one way street—if you like, the team receiving your information can report back and tell you the life story of the bird you've seen.

WHAT THE FAQ?!

Devil in the deep blue sea

Spine-tailed devil rays are legally protected in New Zealand waters and any captures must be reported. But what about these rays is devilish?

- Where and when? Around New Zealand, these rays are mostly known from waters off the north-east of the North Island.
- How big are they? New Zealand sightings include animals from 2 to 8 m across.
- How are they caught? New Zealand purse seine fisheries can capture these rays.
- What's with the name? Check out the photo—whoever named these guys thought the colours and body shape made them look as if they were wearing a spooky cape, and their head extensions (actually fins!) were like devil horns.



A spine-tailed devil ray. Photo: © Guy Stevens, Manta Trust.

The National Plan of Action – Seabirds 2013 Do good things come to those who wait?

New Zealand's second National Plan of Action – Seabirds 2013 describes our approach to reducing seabird deaths that occur incidentally in fishing operations. At the end of a long and bumpy road, the groups involved in the Plan's development are reflecting positively, and tentatively looking to the future.

What will it do?

There are six broad components to the NPOA-Seabird's approach:

- (1) to ensure that national and international awareness of seabird bycatch and bycatch reduction measures is heightened;
- (2) to ensure that effective mitigation methods are used in fisheries in New Zealand, as well as when New Zealand vessels fish on the high seas;
- (3) to ensure that seabird catches are reducing towards negligible levels in our fisheries;
- (4) to ensure that the development of new mitigation, observation and monitoring methods, and relevant research, is encouraged and resourced;
- (5) to use the risk that fishing represents to seabirds to prioritise the development and application of mitigation measures, and other relevant actions, and,
- (6) to ensure co-operation between New Zealand and countries whose fishing vessels encounter our seabirds.

What does the Government think?

The Minister for Primary Industries Hon Nathan Guy launched the NPOA. He said: 'The plan shows there is real determination to improve how we protect our unique seabirds ... This is a high-level framework to help us gain a better understanding of the problem, and deal with it'.



The yellow-eyed penguin (hoiho)—an at-risk species caught in fishing operations. Photo © M. P. Pierre.

What about the green groups?

WWF-New Zealand's (think of the panda logo) former Marine Programme Manager Rebecca Bird said: 'This is a good first step that will need to be implemented effectively ... to achieve real on the water gains for our vulnerable and threatened seabirds.'

Karen Baird of Forest and Bird (and star of last issue's *Who's who?*) was also looking ahead: 'Now that the plan has been approved we need some action. There is a lot of hard work to come ... But I am cautiously optimistic'.

And industry?

Carl Carrington, Chairman of Fisheries Inshore New Zealand said: 'FINZ welcomes this second plan of action to reduce the risks to seabirds from fishing activity. It demonstrates what can be achieved through a collaborative approach and constructive dialogue between government, industry and other stakeholders.... This collaboration and dialogue must continue as we implement the plan'.

The collaborative approach was also reflected by Tim Pankhurst, Chief Executive of Seafood New Zealand: 'The Ministry for Primary Industries has involved many groups, including industry and environmental NGOs, in developing the National Plan of Action. This collaborative approach has led to common-sense processes that will deliver results'.

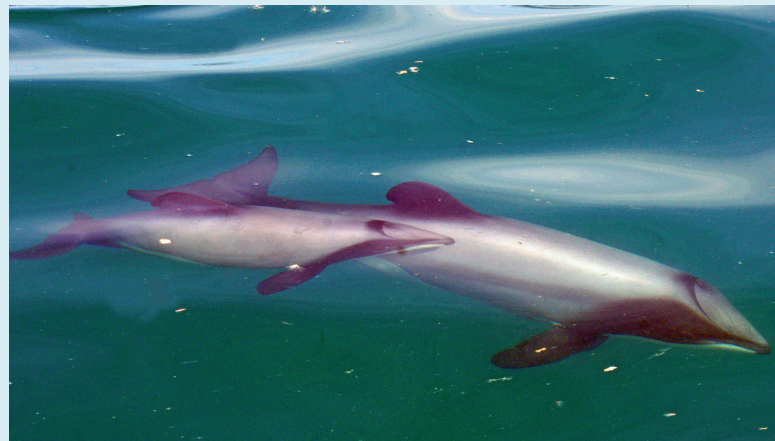
It seems rare that groups with divergent objectives all reflect positively on the same experience. Make up your own mind about the NPOA— see the link in 'Want to know more?'.

More than Maui's

In June, experts involved in the research and management of the world's whales and dolphins will meet in Korea, as the Scientific Committee for the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The political dramas of the IWC often emerge as media headlines. However, the purpose of the Scientific Committee is to provide the best available scientific information and advice to the IWC on the conservation and management of cetaceans.

The IWC is made up of 89 governments including New Zealand and a diverse range of countries, for example, Denmark, Ecuador, Japan, Luxembourg, Kiribati, and South Africa. The Commission was established under a convention signed in 1946. Many members have minimal or no direct involvement with whales. However, any country prepared to follow the convention can join.

Around the Scientific Committee meeting, media attention is normally focused on political manoeuvring and those nations harvesting whales, e.g., Japan. However, issues for discussion are much broader and include whale genetics, distribution, populations, strandings, disease, tourism, ship strike, bycatch, and management. Of course, a hot topic involving New Zealand delegates will be management and scientific work on Hector's and Maui's dolphins. However, our larger whales also get some profile with a couple of good news stories: first, the identification of individual blue whales, and second, increasing detections of mother and calf southern right whales in New Zealand waters.



Hector's dolphin underwater: the cause of much discussion and debate in NZ and beyond. Photo: © M.P. Pierre.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- *Headline:* For more information on bafflers, including the new design, contact John Cleal john.firms@xtra.co.nz or Johanna Pierre johanna@jpec.co.nz. This work was completed as Conservation Services Programme project MIT2011/07. The final report is online: www.doc.govt.nz/warp-strike-mitigation-devices
- *What the FAQ?:* For easy tips on identifying the spine-tailed devil ray at sea, go to: www.fish.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/0C0794C6-D30A-4032-806A-F7554036EEDA/0/Complianceinfosheet08.pdf Interactions between this species and New Zealand's fisheries are described in: <http://www.doc.govt.nz/mitigation-protected-rays>
- Word on the Street: The finalised NPOA can be found at: www.fish.govt.nz/en-nz/Environmental/Seabirds/default.htm