Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

MINISTRY OF FISHERIES
Te Tautiaki i nga tini a Tangaroa

Meeting: **Conservation Services Programme Technical Working Group**
National Plan of Action – Seabirds Technical Working Group

Date: 5 October 2009
Time: 9:30 am – approx. 3:30 pm
Place: Department of Conservation, 18-32 Manners Street, Wellington
Chair: Johanna Pierre (ph: 04-471-3204; email: jpierre@doc.govt.nz)

Present: Stephanie Rowe (DOC), Eric Mellina (MFish), Greg Lydon (SeaFIC), Ed Abraham (Dragonfly), Martin Cryer (MFish), Martin Cawthorn (Cawthorn & Associates), David Thompson (NIWA), Igor Debski (DOC), Pat Reid (Area 2), Mike Percy (Western Underwater Research Team), John Cleal (Clement & Associates, Deepwater Group), George Clement (Clement & Associates), Dave Gilbert, Elizabeth Bell (WMIL), Dave Goad (Vita Maris), Rebecca Bird (WWF), Louise Chilvers (DOC), Finlay Thompson (Dragonfly), Craig Loveridge (MFish).

Apologies: David Middleton (SeaFIC), Richard Wells (Deepwater Group), Rob Mattlin, Carol Scott.

POP2007/01 New Zealand sea lion: Auckland Islands field trip 2008-09, plans for 2009-10 - Louise Chilvers (DOC)

MCry noted there was a suggestion of relatively higher pup production compared to counts of females in the late 90s

ID/DGil – clarified that not formal assessments of pupping rates had been made for those years during recent analyses contracts by DOC, but potentially could be investigated.

DGil enquired whether juvenile foraging areas were mainly within the marine mammal sanctuary

LC replied that there were a large number of tracking points close to Enderby as animals had to pass through on their way out and return, but most animals travelled to forage outside the sanctuary area.

DG/LC discussed the how representative tracking points were of foraging areas, LC concluded that they were likely to be representative.

PR – how long are foraging trips?

LC – highly variable, females and younger animals tend to make shorter foraging trips.

GL enquired about when reporting would be made available.

ID clarified that reporting of raw positions would be made following the season of data collection, but analysis of spatial patterns in a fisheries context would be

reported the following year, so final spatial report for the three year period would be in 2011.

GL expressed concerns over the 2008/09 season report quality, and will provide written comment.

GL enquired whether there was a need for further tracking work to be completed.

ID clarified that the consulted project plan was to collect data over three seasons.

DGil added that this may allow for potential differences between foraging patterns between years to be investigated.

ID called for written comments on the 2008/09 annual field report and 2007/08 spatial analysis report by 26 October 2009.

MIT2006/09 Mitigating fur seal captures in trawl nets. Draft final report - George Clement (Clement & Associates).

LC enquired where in the net and during which period of fishing fur seals were mostly caught.

JC/GC – seals mainly interacted with the net at or near the surface. Seals often accompanied hoki vessels during fishing operations and would wait for nets to be hauled or set. This is different to NZ sea lions where most interactions appear to happen at depth during fishing. As the type of exclusion device tested only operates effectively during fishing when the net is fully open, the utility of such a device to mitigate fur seal interactions in the hoki fishery may therefore be limited. A SED is not an effective mitigation technique during the risk period when the net is at or near the surface.

MCry – were escaping fish actually counted? It may be they do not form such a high proportion of the potential catch.

JC – some counts were made and used to make rough estimates of percentage loss.

MCry – was damage to fish impacting with the SED investigated.

JC – no.

MCaw added that in Australian SED trials the level of fish damage was investigated by looking at the levels of fish minced due to low quality, but no effect was found. However, both fish size and bar spacing is different in the Australian fishery.

ID called for written comments on the draft final report by 26 October 2009.

POP2008/01 Black petrel: Great Barrier Island field trips 2008-09, plans for 2009-10 - Elizabeth Bell (WMIL)

GC - what impact do rats, cats or human disturbance have and is there any trapping etc in place?

EB – impacts of rats and cats very low, in the order of 1-3% predation of eggs/chicks. Adults generally can defend against these predators. No mustelids or possums present. Some rat and cat trapping conducted. There could be about one case of handler disturbance on breeding pairs per year.

PR – what problems do human visitors have?

EB- tourist numbers on the walking tracks could be quite high, but all tracks in the study colony are now boardwalked. Fouling remains a health and safety issue.

DG enquired whether any useful information was obtained from GPS tags that had less than 4 satellite fixes.

EB – not currently, but investigating with manufacturer whether any rough location estimates could be made.

GC – could there be any human interference with the satellite tags?
EB – no, as all tags must be collected from the birds to obtain the data.
PR – which areas off South America do the birds visit?
EB – currently poorly understood, hopefully data being collected can answer that question.
MCaw – how many tags are currently on birds at the moment.
EB – 12.

INT2009/02 Photo-identification of live seabirds: project update - Igor Debski (DOC)

EA – have observers always taken photos?
ID/CL – yes for dead specimens, when possible for live captures. Photo record is not complete, but the number of pictures taken has increased in recent years.
EA encouraged this approach and noted that the photos were a very useful resource in confirming dolphin IDs during recent analyses.
FT – are identifications made in this project going to be made available?
ID – yes, once photos have been examined by experts, and the necessary changes are made to MFish databases.
DGoad noted that genus level codes would also be very useful for observers to record uncertain species.
There was some general discussion and agreement that training observers in taking photographs was a key issue. ID confirmed that training processes were being developed and CSP plan to provide instruction as part of normal training materials.
GL – is this project a one-off?
ID – this project is one-off, aiming to analyse existing photographs and provide recommendations for future processes. For birds, CSP has already proposed that future photo identification be included as part of the autopsy project (see 2010/11 project proposals).

MIT2009/01 Development of mitigation strategies: Inshore fisheries. Project plan - David Goad (Vita Maris).

MCry – will the testing of any mitigation devices be statistically robust?
DGoad/JP – any trials will be developed on a case by case basis considering financial and logistical constraints, and may include stakeholder involvement through appropriate advisory groups.

Results from the 2008 offal mincing experiments: does mincing reduce seabird attendance at trawl vessels? – Ed Abraham (Dragonfly)

PR – were the different fishing areas related to different target fish species?
EA – there were some differences but target species per se was not included as a covariate.
There was some general discussion on the mechanisms by which mincing may impact on bird behaviour. JC proposed that mincing may cause offal to float and be made available to birds at a greater distance to the vessel, compared to whole heads which would sink more quickly. Distribution of mince, or any fish waste, in relation to risk areas (e.g. warps) is key with respect to seabird interactions.

POP2005/02 White-capped albatross: Auckland Islands field trip 2008, plans for 2009 - David Thompson (NIWA)

MCry – was both TCER and TCELR data used for foraging analyses?
DT – yes.
EA – did birds fly close to the coast in Foveaux Strait area?
DT – yes.
DG – although you describe the species as biennial, can they still breed annually?
DT – yes, especially if they did not breed the previous year. This is common in other species – annual and biennial are two ends of a spectrum.
JC – how many nests do pigs depredate?
DT – as many as they can access, probably in the low hundreds, though not in our study area.
GL – how have the species been assessed in the new DOC Threat Classification system? – are they now at a lower risk from fishing as there are more birds than previously thought?
The classification was not at hand, but this species is classified as D.1 At Risk (Declining).
DT noted that this was a numerous albatross species, but long term monitoring would be required to detect population level changes.
DGil estimated that in the order of 0.5% of the albatross population may be bycaught in New Zealand fisheries per annum.
JP called for written comments on the 2008 field report by 26 October 2009. A written work plan for 2009 will be posted with these minutes.

INT2007/02 Seabird autopsy: 2008-09 progress report - David Thompson (NIWA)

PR enquired about the circumstances of 19 Buller's albatross returned in May
DT – confirmed that these were returned from southern bluefin tuna charter vessels.
DGil noted that the increase in black petrel returns was likely due to observer coverage in longline fisheries in FMA1.
MP enquired whether plastic debris was found in stomach contents, as this material may be picked up on their migration routes.
DT – the presence of plastic is recorded, and reported, but material is not retained or further investigated.

Seabird abundance (observer counts) – Finlay Thompson (Dragonfly)

GL – what instructions do observers follow in conducting counts?
SR – they were developed via a working group process and can be provided to those interested. A sweep spot count is made.
GL – are counts made on the first haul of the day?
SR – yes, but on DOC-only trips multiple counts are made.
MCry noted that if protocols have changed over time, any trends over time need to be interpreted cautiously.
GL enquired as to the rationale for observers making bird counts?

SR – the aim of the current analysis is to determine the value of the data set that has historically been collected. This will inform a decision on whether to continue, discontinue or change the data collected.

EA added that the information was of potentially important use in assessing spatial/temporal overlaps with fishing effort, and could be used to constrain bycatch estimates, or aid risk assessments.

DGoad recommended training be provided to observers to conduct the counts, and having more generic species codes would aid recoding.

GL suggested the data may not be worth the effort taken to groom and analyse it.

There was some general discussion on the utility of the data, and some general consensus that presence/absence and order of magnitude data were relatively robust.

EB noted that even location data from the counts could be very informative, as placing geologgers on birds may only give location to within 150kms.

GL – are photographs taken of birds being counted?

SR – sometimes.

CL noted that results from the photo identification and autopsy projects could be used to rate observer identification levels for different species.

Electronic Monitoring trial 2008 - Igor Debski (DOC)

ID introduced the project, project report, and updated the group on further work to analyse data not included in the reported (to be added as an addendum). A presentation was not possible for the current meeting due to contractor availability.

There was a general consensus that the group would like to see a full presentation of the work. ID will update stakeholders, when a date is arranged.

PR noted that water on the lens formed a problem in limiting image quality, and should be further investigated.

JP closed the meeting, and called for any further comments on any of the material presented, or on the draft minutes, by 26 October 2009.