BYCATCH BYLINES

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HEADLINE

Black in the spotlight

But we're not talking rugby . . . black petrels are now known to be the seabird most threatened by commercial fishing in New Zealand waters. What's going on here, and how can we turn it around?

Many of you won't have ever seen a black petrel. They breed only in the Hauraki Gulf, and leave New Zealand waters for part of the year. In New Zealand, they have been bycaught in fisheries using both longline and trawl gear, e.g., snapper, bluenose, bigeye tuna, swordfish, and scampi. While the number of birds killed in each fishery might be small, the total killed is more than the petrel population can handle.

Around 1,500 breeding pairs of black petrels exist. The birds lay their eggs in burrows. From 1995 to 2011, just over 400 black petrel burrows have been intensively monitored to find out what the petrels are up to. The results of this study, conducted at Great Barrier Island, show that the population seems to be declining. The decline estimated between 2004/05 and 2009/10 is more than one fifth, or 22%, of the breeding population.

So, what can we do about this? On Great Barrier, the Department of Conservation is working to increase the success of petrel breeding attempts. Around 60–85% of breeding attempts succeed. Sometimes competition for burrows or infertile eggs causes breeding to fail. Eggs and chicks can also be eaten by rats and cats. DOC has an active trapping programme to kill these nasties. Trapping happens every year.

At sea, you can help. Black petrels are at home in northern New Zealand waters. They like to feed along the edges of the continental shelf, over seamounts, and behind fishing vessels!

To reduce the chance of catching black petrels, there are some basic things you can do.

- Sink your gear as fast as possible when setting/shooting
- Haul your gear as quickly as possible
- Keep old baits, guts, other offal, and discards onboard until your gear is out of the water
- Run a good tori line
- Don't set/shoot or haul when lots of birds are around

Black petrel *Photo: DOC*

If you do catch a bird, let it go quickly and carefully following the advice here: www.southernseabirds.org/f2139,106303/106303_Safe_Seabird_Release_Poster_11th_jan.pdf and don't forget to report the capture.

YOUR VOICE

Know someone who's really Seabird SMART?

Southern Seabird Solutions Trust is calling for nominations for the 2012 Seabird Smart Awards. These awards recognise those who are passionate and committed to strengthening the Seabird SMART fishing culture in New Zealand. Seabird SMART fishing involves: Safeguarding seabirds, Mitigating risks, Avoiding attracting seabirds, Reporting seabird captures, and Treating and releasing seabirds with care.

2010 Seabird Smart Award winners: From the FV *Thomas Harrison*, John Saxon and Ted Goomes, with former Minister of Fisheries Hon Phil Heatley and SSS Trustee Bill Mansfield. *Photo: www.southernseabirds.org/ss-awards*

Recognise leading fishing practice—make your nomination before October 26 2012 at: www.surveymonkey.com/s/XNBB59H
For more information, go to: www.southernseabirds.org/ss-awards

WHAT'S UP?

What happened to the Ocean Guardian?

If you think *Bycatch Bylines* is the same but different, you're right. We asked for your feedback, and now the old *Ocean Guardian* has had a facelift.

Here are some of the changes:

- a broader scope—no longer just trawl and longline, but protected species interactions with all commercial fishing methods
- more issues —with one every two months, for a total of 6 per year
- new columns—including 'Word on the street', where opinions on different issues are showcased, and 'Want to know more?', where you can find more information on content you're most interested in
- a new email address—please write to us at: bycatch.bylines@yahoo.com.

WHO'S WHO?

With restructures happening in every government department you can shake a stick at, it's easy to lose track of who's who. This month, we get to know Ian Angus, the Manager—Marine Species and Threats, Department of Conservation. His work includes managing the Conservation Services Programme—the team working with industry and other stakeholders to reduce the impacts of commercial fishing on protected species.

We asked Ian about a day in the office . . .

What attracted you to work in the marine area?

Activities in the sea are growing. How best to manage this growth and the resultant interactions with marine species is a real challenge for New Zealand. I wanted to be in that mix.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

The best part is easy—being part of making marine conservation work across a range of fronts and with different sectors. The biggest frustration . . . that's got to be information overload. There is simply so much going on that keeping on track, informed and current is a real challenge.

What are the biggest challenges of working in this area?

Ensuring my team remains relevant. We constantly need to keep an eye on upcoming opportunities, issues, new tools or research. If we don't, we become dated and who wants to take advice from an out-of-date agency?!

What are your top priorities for the next year?

I'm going to be seeking to consolidate my team and to ensure our relationships with all sectors grow. DOC is working to ensure parties interested in taking conservation forward are supported. I see my team as playing a leading role in terms of marine conservation, but to do this we need to keep building upon our relation-base across all sectors, most certainly with fishers.
So drop me a line if you have a burning question . . .

What sort of things float your boat outside of work hours?

Well I'd like to be able to say that I do all sorts of exciting stuff. But, these days I find I'm either running my daughter to some sort of activity—swim, dance etc.—or running after my 2-year-old son!

Ian in action at the Advisory Committe meeting of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, 2010. *Photo: ACAP*

Thanks Ian!

If you'd like to make contact, Ian's email address is below. Let him know who you are and how his team can help.

WANT TO KNOW MORE ?

- *Headline:* More about black petrels can be found in this report: www.doc.govt.nz/ go to publications/conservation/Marine & coastal/Conservation Services Programme reports
- *Who's who*: Ian can be contacted at iangus@doc.govt.nz.
- *World watch:* SETFIA Contact Simon Boag: simonboag@setfia.org.au.

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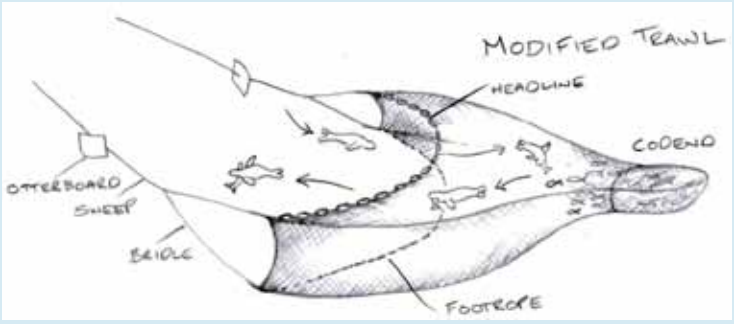
WORLD WATCH

Shorter nets for safer seals?

Some of the best discoveries are made by accident, like the adhesives that made post-it notes and superglue world-famous . . . An accidental discovery that may be life-changing, if you're a seal, has been made by trawl fishermen in southeast Australia.

Like some trawl fisheries in New Zealand, Australian trawl fisheries can catch fur seals. Also like New Zealand, management measures exist that aim to reduce these captures. Measures in Australia include a code of practice, the requirement to report seal interactions, and the mandatory use of seal excluder devices on large factory vessels.

For smaller trawl vessels, trials to develop a functional excluder device have not yet succeeded. The use of seal excluder devices is not required on these vessels and to date, there has been no technical fix for seal captures. However, a new project is looking at whether changes in net design can reduce seal bycatch.



Sketch of the modified trawl net design. *Image: A. Dunsmore © 2012 South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association.*

The chance discovery happened last year, when the crew of a vessel operating in the South East Trawl Fishery (Australia's second largest fishery) were in a hurry to get fishing. To save time, they didn't sew the normal lengtheners into their trawl net. Then when they used the modified gear, they found it didn't cost them target catch. Over time, they noticed fewer seal interactions.

Recognising the potential significance of their experience, the fishermen decided to take it further. They approached their industry body, the South East Trawl Fishing Association (SETFIA), to test their discovery scientifically. SETFIA then engaged Fishwell Consulting to design at-sea trials to test if the modified gear affected fish catch or seal catch. The project now has funding from the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and ExxonMobil Australia. A steering committee of key stakeholders is also in place to guide the project's progress. At-sea trials and analysis will be completed over the next year and a half, and results will be available in 2014. If the project outcomes confirm the fishermen's observations, seals' and fishers' lives will both be made easier—a good result!

WHAT THE FAQ?!

Mega mantas

Manta rays are protected in New Zealand waters. Worldwide, they are bycaught in fishing gears including purse seine, trawl and gill nets.

- Manta rays are amongst the world's biggest fish. They can grow to sizes of more than 7 m across. They have no sting.
- Mantas breed very slowly. They have one pup, born live, after a year-long pregnancy.
- Mantas feed on plankton filtered through their gills.
- Manta rays are worth more alive than dead. They support tourism industries estimated to have a global worth of US $100 million annually. Centres include the Maldives, Mozambique, and Hawaii.

FEEDBACK

To submit feedback or questions, please email: bycatch.bylines@yahoo.com