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INT2019-01 OBSERVING COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

Overall supportive of this approach. Specific comment about the Cook Strait Hoki Fishery. According to the *Protected Species Bycatch Database*, mean observer coverage over the 15 year period 2002/03-2016/17 was very low at only 3.9% (max = 8.5%, min = 1.3%) with a total estimated number of fur seal captures of 2,969 individuals comprising a mean of 195 seals per year. Almost all of the reported captures are mortalities. This is approximately one third of all fur seals estimated as caught in trawl fisheries NZ over that period. Strongly recommend increased observer coverage (e.g. >50%) in this fishery for several years to establish an understanding of the fishery and factors influencing bycatch. This level of bycatch could be unsustainable for local populations of fur seals if all the bycatch is coming from a single or small number of colonies. I would also recommend that consideration is given to investigating potential impacts on local fur seal populations. Such a research programme should include (i) identification and monitoring of breeding and non-breeding fur seal sites around the Cook Strait area in the vicinity of the fishery, (ii) investigation of whether it is possible to establish which locations bycaught seals may be coming from (e.g. genetics – which would require samples collected from bycaught individuals) and (iii) undertaking satellite tracking of foraging seals from local Cook Strait colonies to establish spatial overlap between seals and the fishery to explore mitigation options using the SEFRA approach. This bycatch has been discussed previously and no action has been taken that I am aware of. While there is some evidence of a small decline in bycatch rates, the present rate could still be unsustainable and must be reduced. Conclusion: Increase existing observer coverage to >50% for 2-3 years and develop new POP project to monitor the impact of this level of bycatch on local Cook Strait fur seal populations.

INT2019-03 CHARACTERISATION OF MARINE MAMMAL INTERACTIONS

Support this project and suggest that the budget is increased to \$35k reflect the amount of data and the complexity of the analysis.

POP2019-05 NEW ZEALAND FUR SEAL: BOUNTY ISLANDS POPULATION ASSESSMENT

Support this project. Important given level of bycatch around the Bounties. Exploring existing available data is sensible and cost effective.

MIT2019-01 DOLPHIN DISSUASIVE DEVICE MITIGATION IN INSHORE FISHERIES

Support this project. Review of existing data and development of possible future trials is appropriate.

NEW PROJECT – REVIEW OF METHODS TO REDUCE IMPACTS ON LIVE CAUGHT FUR SEALS IN SURFACE LONGLINING

1725 fur seals have been caught during surface longlining operations between 2002/03 and 2015/16 (*Protected Species Bycatch Database*). Most of these appear to be released alive but the general method of release is to simply pull the seal in as close as possible to the vessel and cutting the snood. This leaves a hook embedded in the seal and with it trailing several metres (or more) of snood. It would be useful to understand (i) what is the prognosis for these seals (e.g. live/die/live but impacted) and (ii) what could be done to minimise impacts from these bycatch events. A desktop review would be appropriate.