

Draft Conservation Services Programme Annual Plan 2021/22
Submission on behalf the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust

25 May 2021

Background

The endangered endemic yellow-eyed penguin | hoiho is an iconic species, which is exposed to a range of impacts. The northern population of hoiho (mainland and Rakiura) have declined by 70% since 2008, and in 2020/21 only c180 breeding pairs were observed on mainland New Zealand. Their serious plight requires action to avoid extinction, whilst continuing to improve our understanding of the causes of the decline.

Te Kaweka Takohaka mō te Hoiho is an integrated strategy to support the health and wellbeing of hoiho across their marine and terrestrial habitats, and its implementation is supported by Te Mahere Rima Tau, a five year action plan. These plans have been developed in partnership between Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, Department of Conservation, Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust and Fisheries New Zealand.

General feedback

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Draft Conservation Services Programme Annual Plan 2021/22.

The Conservation Services Programme works in parallel with other relevant planning and management processes (e.g. the National Plan of Action – seabirds). Alignment is also recommended with Te Kaweka Takohaka mō te Hoiho, the strategy for hoiho conservation, and Te Mahere Rima Tau, the supporting action plan to ensure a seamless strategy across the various government frameworks.

The Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust are keen to see specific research on hoiho funded, as well as programmes which have broader implications for hoiho.

2. Interaction Projects

2.1 Observing commercial fisheries (INT2020-01)

This project is supported overall. The Trust supports the provision of observers for coverage of fisheries, in order to help understand the nature and extent of bycatch. Of particular relevance is observer coverage in the East Coast South Island and South Coast South Island setnet fisheries where there is overlap with hoiho habitat.

It is disappointing to see that the observer coverage is no longer presented within the CSP Annual plan despite it being one of the main interaction projects. YEPT would prefer to see that this information continues to be presented as part of the CSP annual plan.

Observer coverage of at least 50% is recommended for setnets in 2021/22 in the East Coast South Island and for the South Coast South Island in line with the strategic priorities and actions in Te Kaweka Takohaka mō te Hoiho and Te Mahere Rima Tau, and to provide reliable bycatch estimates for rare species (as per Babcock et al. 2003).

3. Population Projects

It is disappointing to see that there are no population projects relating to hoiho within the CSP annual plan.

4. Mitigation Projects

4.2 Protected species liaison project (MIT 2021-01)

This project to grow liaison capacity across inshore fleets is fully supported as well as the efforts to reduce protected species bycatch.

The protected species liaison roles are an essential link between the fishers, industry and Fisheries NZ. The focus of this project on ensuring that fishers have adequate support and information to enable them to meet best practice mitigation into everyday operations. Of particular relevance for hoiho are setnet and to a lesser extent inshore trawl fisheries.

Again, there is alignment with the strategic priority in Te Kaweka Takohaka mō te Hoiho to ensure that bycatch does not threaten hoiho, and linked conservation actions.

Other comments

It is disappointing to see that there are no projects relating to the mitigation of hoiho, despite the commitment of partners to progress specific strategic priorities within the hoiho strategy and action plan on this topic.

A project was submitted to CSP earlier this year for consideration in the annual plan to progress a project to "*Identify and implement preferred mitigation methods to eliminate bycatch and transition set net fisheries in hoiho habitat*". The main aims of this project were to build on the existing knowledge gathered through the CSP process and engage with fishers, industry and others to investigate real viable alternatives to setnetting in hoiho habitat (e.g. spearfishing for butterfish). It was proposed that this would involve a workshop to capture options, work through a framework for how to prioritise the options and capture pros/cons, and then work through mechanisms for implementation.

This project was specifically designed to address actions 6a and 6e from Te Mahere Rima Tau which were committed to by partners (6a: *implement and incentivise practices that eliminate bycatch as necessary, particularly from set netting throughout the northern population range; 6e investigate the potential impacts and opportunities of transitioning fisheries from setnetting to other methods on fishers, hoiho and other species*).

Thank you once again for the opportunity to make a submission on the draft CSP annual plan.

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