

## FAQs for National Plan of Action - Seabirds 2020

### 1. Why is it important to have this plan?

Seabirds are amongst the most threatened groups of birds globally and fisheries bycatch is one of the greatest threats to many of them. Many species of seabird are considered Taonga.

Because of the number of seabird species that breed and/or forage in New Zealand, mitigating risks from fishing activities is particularly important for us. We need to work closely with fishers (commercial and non-commercial) and others to educate them on the importance of seabirds and work together to find the best practicable, innovative solutions to reduce the risk of seabird captures.

One of the areas we know we can make a difference is reducing incidental catch of seabirds in fisheries. This plan is central to our ability to collectively meet this challenge.

### 2. Why did you review the Plan?

Fisheries New Zealand and the Department of Conservation reviewed and updated our National Plan of Action for Seabirds so it continues to be effective, keeps pace with the changing environment, and enables us to measure and report on progress towards reducing fishing-related risk to seabird populations.

The NPOA Seabirds 2020:

- Defines measurable objectives for the prevention, monitoring and management of incidental seabird captures in New Zealand fisheries and sets out performance measures to monitor progress towards the objectives;
- Focuses on education and supporting fishers to take all practicable steps to minimise risk to seabirds, building on current initiatives such as the deployment of hook shielding devices and liaison officer programmes to support fishers to develop effective mitigation; and
- Drives more research and builds on existing information-gathering processes to effectively manage fisheries impacts on seabirds, as well as working with fisheries companies to improve ways to avoid bycatch happening in the first place.

### 3. What are some of the practical measures in this plan? (what are the goals and objectives specifically?)

The plan contains four goals:

1. Avoiding bycatch – the objectives under this goal relate to all fishers using measures that best avoid the risk of seabird captures
2. Healthy seabird populations – the objectives under this goal relate to prioritising resources for those species we identify as being of particular concern
3. Research and information – the objectives under this goal relate to having the information we need to measure progress against the objectives of the NPOA, and
4. International engagement – the objectives under this goal relate to reducing the risk that New Zealand seabirds face when they are in other jurisdictions

The measurable objectives in this plan will mean that commercial fishers will need to use mitigation methods that have been demonstrated to be effective in reducing incidental

capture of seabirds. This plan will support and guide fishers to use effective bycatch mitigation practices. These vary by the type of fishing method, and include bird scaring lines, weighting longlines, fishing at night, avoiding areas important to seabirds and reducing discharge that attracts birds to fishing boats. The plan also describes a range of research and monitoring approaches to fully understand the quantity of bycatch, what can contribute to the risk of bycatch events, and how to report on how many fishers are using mitigation measures and how well they are working.

#### 4. What feedback did you seek from the public exactly?

When we consulted on the draft Plan (between November 2019 and January 2020) we asked people whether they supported the vision of the draft Plan, whether they thought there should be additional goals and objectives, and whether they thought the performance measures were clear and would demonstrate progress towards achieving the objectives.

Component of NPOA	Question / prompt?
Vision	Do you support the vision?  Would you support an alternative vision to aim for 'zero seabird bycatch'?
Goals	Do you think there should be any additional goals?
Objectives	Do you support the objectives?  Do you think additional objectives are necessary to achieve the goals?
Performance measures	Are there performance measures you consider are not clear and measurable?  Where a performance measure includes a target, do you consider the target appropriate?  Are there additional performance measures you think should be included?
General	Do you have any other comments?

#### 5. What changed following public feedback?

Fisheries New Zealand and the Department of Conservation amended the final NPOA based on feedback from stakeholder submissions as follows.

- An amended vision that acknowledges the support for zero bycatch
- Amendments to all four of the goals
- Amendments to four of the 11 objectives
- Amendments to 15 of the 33 initial performance measures

- Addition of new performance measures or replacement of initial performance measures

## **6. How will you know if the goals have been achieved?**

Each goal has objectives to be achieved within the next five years, and there are over 30 performance measures which will help us know how we are tracking towards these goals. Fisheries New Zealand and DOC will monitor and report on the Plan's performance measures annually. This information will be used to set the following year's priorities in a Seabird Implementation Plan that will be updated regularly.

Over the duration of this plan, we expect significant change in the data available on at-sea fisher behaviour, which will greatly enhance our ability to monitor and measure risk to seabirds from fishing. After five years, we will review the achievements and challenges of the NPOA Seabirds 2020.

## **7. What are the main threats facing seabirds?**

There are many threats facing seabirds – the key threats being fisheries bycatch, invasive predatory species, disease, pollution, harvesting, and climate change.

## **8. Which species are you targeting with this plan?**

This plan focusses on bycatch of all seabirds in New Zealand.

The species identified as being at most risk from bycatch in New Zealand include black petrel, Salvin's albatross, Westland petrel, flesh-footed shearwater, southern Buller's albatross and Gibson's albatross.

## **9. Which agencies and businesses have been involved in developing this plan?**

The plan was developed jointly by Fisheries New Zealand and DOC, with input from an advisory group with representation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Te Ohu Kaimoana, commercial fishing industry organisations, environmental NGOs, and the recreational fishing sector.

## **10. How will this plan protect seabirds?**

This plan addresses one of the key threats to many species of seabirds, fisheries bycatch. It aims to ensure all fishers, commercial, recreational and customary, understand the risks to seabirds from fishing and do the best they can to avoid bycatch. This complements work to protect seabird breeding sites from threats such as invasive predators.

## **11. What changes in behaviour are needed from fishers?**

Some commercial fishers have made good strides towards preventing seabird capture, and this should be acknowledged.

This plan will mean that all sectors of the fishing industry need to implement effective bycatch mitigation, and this uptake will be measured and reported as part of implementing the plan. Fishers on the water will need to be supported to implement effective mitigation, and learn how to respond to bycatch events and/or aggressive seabird behaviours.

The plan will increase awareness of seabird bycatch within the non-commercial sector.

## **12. Does the plan have teeth? What sort of compliance are you expecting?**

At the heart of the plan is a programme to change behaviour, so that fishers are using the most effective ways to avoid seabird bycatch.

New Zealand's commercial fishing fleet has diverse operational practices. Applying rigid 'one-size-fits-all' seabird bycatch mitigation strategies may produce sub-optimal results. Tailoring strategies to specific operational situations is critical to reducing the risk of seabird capture. A number of tools are used to avoid bycatch, including both legislative requirements and collaborative approaches such as liaison programmes. Mitigation Standards have been developed to provide clear guidance and expectations around vessel-specific protected species risk management plans.

Annual review of the implementation and effectiveness of Mitigation Standards will be used to inform the development of regulatory measures, where required, to ensure the objectives of the NPOA Seabirds 2020 are met.

## **13. Does this Plan go far enough towards protecting seabirds?**

Fisheries bycatch is only one of the threats faced by seabirds. This Plan will provide real and measurable progress to further reducing fishing-related seabird captures and the direct risk to seabird populations from fishing activities. Together with other conservation management actions, such as protecting breeding sites and controlling invasive predators, it will provide our seabird populations with the greatest chance to recover and flourish.

## **14. What's the difference between direct and indirect effects of NZ fishing?**

The direct effects of fishing is primarily the bycatch of seabirds in fishing gear. Indirect effects include the removal of seabird food sources or fishing-related changes to the marine environment that make less food available. Such potential threats are still poorly understood, and are difficult to separate from other factors such as climate variability and natural fish population movements or fluctuations. DOC and Fisheries New Zealand are developing a research plan to better understand this important topic.

## **15. What has monitoring of the last action plan shown? Has there been any progress?**

The review of the 2013 NPOA identified areas to improve, in particular the need to have clear performance measures to monitor progress against objectives. This has been fed into the new Plan's objectives and performance measures. The review of progress against the last plan was a crucial part of developing this new plan.

## **16. How many seabirds are caught in New Zealand fisheries?**

In the 2017-18 fishing year there were an estimated 3,328 seabird captures in commercial trawl and longline fisheries. This include both birds killed and captures where birds were released alive. However, not all bycatch can be observed, and allowing for additional cryptic mortality gives a total estimate of potential fatalities of 12,900 birds per year. However, this estimate is highly uncertain because of the lack of understanding of seabird capture rates in areas that have had low monitoring in the past. Under this plan we will be able to measure and report on progress towards reducing fishing-related risk to seabird populations.

## **17. How realistic is a zero bycatch goal?**

The amended Vision of the Plan is that 'New Zealanders work toward zero fishing related seabird mortalities'. This ambitious vision acknowledges the desire for there to be no seabird deaths from fishing activities and we believe working towards this remains achievable.

Achieving an absolute zero bycatch with current technology and knowledge is unrealistic for many fisheries in the short term. That is why there is a strong element in this plan to better develop and refine bycatch mitigation techniques, so that we continue to work towards zero mortalities.

**18. What did the last plan achieve?**

During the previous NPOA, significant research has been carried out on seabird species and bycatch, resulting in better information available to help us understand seabird interactions with fishing activity.

There has also been a lot of work to develop and expand a bycatch liaison officer programme, where specialist officers work individually with fishing operators to develop vessel specific bycatch mitigation plans, and assist in providing support and advice in constructing and deploying the most effective mitigation devices.

**19. What are the challenges still to be worked through from the last plan?**

There is no single solution to the bycatch problem and a suite of techniques are needed to try to mitigate against bycatch. Some of the remaining challenges that are being addressed in this plan, include:

- identifying and implementing effective bycatch mitigation across small inshore vessels that have a high degree of variability in their operation
- measuring and reporting bycatch to demonstrate progress and allow for adaptive management.
- Influencing behaviour in areas beyond New Zealand waters

**20. Why don't you regulate mitigation measures for seabird bycatch for all vessels?**

There already are regulatory requirements in various fisheries for the use of seabird mitigation devices, in particular for large trawlers, and in longline fisheries. In other more poorly known fisheries, such as inshore trawl, we are yet to identify the most effective and widely applicable mitigation methods so it is too early to make robust legislative requirements. This plan will ensure we can reach a stage within the next five years where a mitigation plan is developed for each vessel with high risk of bycatch, and this may lead to further legislative requirements in due course.

The Plan supports commercial fishers in adopting the best available mitigation options suited to their operation and encourages further innovation in the commercial sector, with regulatory tools also available to ensure the objectives of the Plan are met.

**21. Why do you allow for seabirds to be killed when they are protected species?**

Almost all seabirds are absolutely protected in New Zealand under the Wildlife Act. However, it is recognised that there may be accidental bycatch in fisheries, and subject to reporting requirements, this is not illegal. This plan aims to minimise seabird bycatch to the lowest levels feasible over the next five years.