

Office of Hon Phil Heatley

Minister of Fisheries
Minister of Housing

Dear Stakeholder

2008-09 SQU6T Operational Plan

This letter sets out the management measures I intend to implement in accordance with s 15 (2) of the Fisheries Act 1996 (the Act) for the 2008-09 squid trawl (SQU6T) fishery.

The purpose of these measures is to mitigate the effects that vessels, operating in the SQU6T fishery, have on the Auckland Island sea lion population. These measures will be implemented through the SQU6T Operational Plan, which accompanies this letter, and will include:

- A limit on the number of sea lion deaths attributable to vessels operating in the SQU6T fishery – the fishing-related mortality limit (FRML);
- Procedures to monitor sea lion bycatch against this limit;
- A process to close the fishery if this limit is reached.

In reaching my decision, I have carefully considered the revised Breen-Kim model, the most recent sea lion population information and available information on the efficacy of sea lion exclusion devices to reduce sea lion bycatch. I have taken into account the views of the Minister of Conservation, advice from the Ministry of Fisheries, as well as views provided by stakeholders.

I have also given careful regard to the legislative provisions and my obligations under the Act, particularly my obligations for managing the fishing-related mortality of protected species (section 15), the environmental and information principles (sections 9 and 10) and the purpose of the Act (section 8). I also considered the important contribution that the squid fishery makes to the New Zealand economy in terms of export revenues generated

Fishing-related mortality limit

I have decided to set a fishing-related mortality limit (FRML) for the 2008-09 fishing year of 113 sea lions. This FRML is based on Rule 320.

In making my decision I considered the results of the revised Breen Kim model which, at a broad level, indicate that fishing activity is not adversely impacting on the sea lion population. I recognise that in spite of the considerable information that is available to inform this decision, there are still uncertainties around squid trawl and sea lion interactions. Comprehensive information on the extent of this uncertainty was also provided to me in the advice paper from the Ministry of Fisheries and I carefully considered this when making my decision.

I am aware of the on-going concerns around the current sea lion population size and because of this I chose a FRML at the conservative end of the range available to me. Until the sea lion pup numbers show a consistent increase I believe exercising caution when setting the FRML is warranted.

I believe setting the FRML at 113 sea lions ensures the appropriate balance between providing for utilisation and ensuring this utilisation does not pose an unacceptable risk to the sea lion population. I intend to close the SQU6T fishery if the FRML is reached.

Predetermined strike rate

I have decided to retain the current strike rate of 5.65% for the 2008-09 squid season. This strike rate will be used to monitor sea lion mortalities against the FRML. This means that for every 100 tows undertaken by SQU6T vessels, 5.65 sea lions will be counted towards the FRML. There was no new information available to suggest that the strike rate should be altered for the coming season.

The use of a predetermined strike rate effectively imposes a maximum number of tows that can take place in the fishery before the FRML is reached and the fishery is closed. Vessel operators are required to provide information on all tows undertaken to the Deepwater Group Ltd (DWG), as set out in the operational plan. Vessel operators must provide accurate and timely information to the DWG to ensure effective monitoring of the FRML in the 2008-09 fishing season.

Sea lion exclusion device (SLED) discount factor

Vessels operating in the SQU6T fishery which deploy an approved SLED and meet the monitoring and reporting requirements set out in the operational plan are eligible for a discount on the strike rate. This discount factor recognises that if SLEDs are manufactured and deployed correctly, they can mitigate the risk to sea lions from squid trawl vessels.

I have decided to retain the current discount rate of 35% as I am satisfied that SLEDs make a significant contribution to sea lion survivability. In making this decision I considered the information available on SLED design and the results from sea lion necropsies and I am suitably persuaded that, irrespective of the continued uncertainty, SLEDs facilitate sea lions to escape from trawl gear and contribute to their survivability. A discount factor of 35% will provide an effective strike rate of 3.67% for any qualifying tow. As in previous fishing years

vessel operators must strictly comply with the conditions set out in the operational plan to receive this discount.

Vessel operator performance during the 2008-09 SQU6T season

I note there were concerns raised last year with regard to the accurate reporting of sea lion captures from non-observed vessels in the fleet. I strongly encourage all vessel operators to ensure their vessel crew fully understand their reporting obligations. Failing to report a capture is an offence under the Marine Mammal Protection Act 1978.

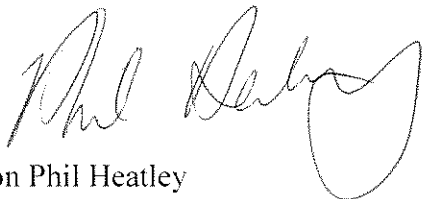
With the exception of on-going concerns about the veracity of reporting from non-observed vessels, I am pleased to note that vessel performance did improve during the 2007-08 fishing year. This was the first fishing year that all tows were eligible for the SLED discount rate. I look forward to this level of performance continuing and even improving over the coming season.

Operational Plan

The details necessary for the adoption of these measures can be found in the 2008-09 SQU6T Operational Plan which accompanies this decision letter. Vessel operators should fully comply with all elements of this operational plan.

Copies of the Operational Plan and the Final Advice Paper provided to me by MFish will also be available on the MFish website at www.fish.govt.nz. For further information on the operational plan, please contact either Aoife Martin on (04) 819 4675 or Jeremy Helson (04) 819 4643 at the Ministry of Fisheries.

Yours sincerely



Hon Phil Heatley
Minister of Fisheries