

3 September 2004

Dear Stakeholder

CONSULTATION ON THE INITIAL POSITION PAPER FOR THE OPERATIONAL PLAN TO MANAGE INCIDENTAL CAPTURE OF NEW ZEALAND SEA LIONS IN THE SQU6T TRAWL FISHERY FOR THE 2004-05 FISHING YEAR

I am writing to seek your comments on the proposed management regime to address New Zealand sea lion interactions in the southern squid trawl fishery (SQU6T) during the 2004-05 fishing year. The objective and features of the proposed operational plan are presented in the accompanying Initial Position Paper (IPP), prepared by the Ministry of Fisheries with input from the Department of Conservation.

Comments should be sent to Nathan Glassey at the Ministry of Fisheries, Private Bag 14, Nelson (FAX 03 546 9327, or email glassey@fish.govt.nz) no later than **Friday, 17 September 2004**.

The relatively short consultation period reflects the objective to secure a decision by the Minister of Fisheries on the operational plan before the 1 October start of the 2004-05 fishing year. The belated release of the Court of Appeals reasons for their decision on the 2003-04 operational plan has delayed completion of the document as officials have considered that decision in developing the 2004-05 plan. MFish notes that the SQU6T fishery has commenced in February during recent years, such that some margin in finalisation of the plan might be possible so long as any delay still provides for adequate planning and coordination in advance of the start of fishing.

A modest delay in finalisation of the 2004-05 operational plan later into October raises some complications for those quota owners who plan to enter into ACE trades early in the upcoming fishing year. Requirements of the plan are not regulatory, such that coordination is essential to ensure that ACE fishers comply with the operational plan. MFish will endeavour to inform stakeholders of the progress towards completing the 2004-05 plan.

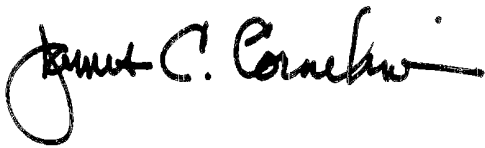
Many stakeholders will be aware of the operation of the SQU6T fishery, the nature of current sea lion management, and the Court of Appeals ruling that set aside the 2003-04 sea lion operational plan. However, we cannot assume what the Minister's decision will be this year. The IPP sets out the initial proposals for 2004-05 put forth by the MFish.

To a large extent, the features of the operational plan are similar to that employed in the past; a limit on sea lion mortalities reflecting utilisation and sustainability objectives in the Fisheries Act, and a reporting procedure to monitor sea lion bycatch in the SQU6T fishery accruing to that limit. The Fisheries Act allows the Minister to close the fishery when the mortality limit is reached.

Key elements in the plan include the sea lion mortality limit, the strike rate used to estimate the number of sea lion mortalities based on tows undertaken, a discount to the strike rate applied to tows conducted with suitable sea lion exclusion devices (SLEDs), requirements for reporting both tows undertaken and sea lion captures, and provisions for monitoring fishing activity by MFish observers. There are no provisions for monitoring the actual in season strike rate, nor are there requirements for tied down cover nets on vessels employing SLEDs.

In the event that you would like to meet with MFish officials to discuss the IPP during the consultation period, please contact Mr Glassey or me at your earliest convenience such that a meeting can be arranged.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim C. Cornelius". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Jim Cornelius
Senior Fisheries Management Advisor
Ministry of Fisheries