



Hon David Benson-Pope
Member of Parliament for Dunedin South
Minister of Fisheries
Associate Minister for the Environment

1 August 2005

Dear Stakeholder

Each year the Ministry of Fisheries (MFish) undertakes a process to develop and implement an Operational Plan to manage interactions between the New Zealand (Hooker's) sea lion and the southern squid trawl fishery (SQU 6T). The Operational Plan seeks to mitigate the effects of fishing related mortality on the sea lion population.

The New Zealand sea lion is considered for the purposes of the Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978 to be not immediately threatened with extinction but potentially still vulnerable to population decline. It's classification is as a "threatened species".

Over 95% of this species' breeding population occurs in the Auckland Islands. To mitigate the risk to this population, the Government imposed a 12 nautical mile exclusion zone around the Auckland Islands in 1986 to prohibit fishing close to major breeding grounds. In January 2004 this became part of the Motu Maha Marine Reserve.

Outside the 12mile exclusion zone there are active commercial fisheries for various species, including arrow squid. Because the foraging range of these sea lions overlaps the fishing grounds of the southern squid trawl fishery, animals can get caught in the nets of trawlers and die during the fishing season.

To mitigate this, each year MFish develops an Operational Plan that sets a limit on the number of sea lion deaths. In doing so, MFish is legally required to balance the economic advantage of the fishery against the impact of fishing-related mortality on the sea lion population. The Minister of Fisheries closes the fishery when this mortality level is reached.

A scientific model is used to predict how much fishing-related mortality can occur in the fishery each year without affecting the sea lion's long-term sustainability. Operational Plans for this fishery have traditionally been cautious, and have allowed far lower numbers of sea lion deaths than the theoretical maximum predicted by the scientific model. Scientific modelling is included to assist decision-making.

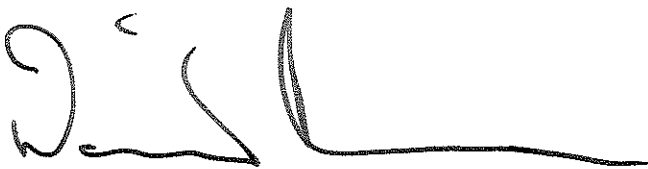
The objective and features of this year's proposed Operational Plan are presented in the accompanying Initial Position Paper, prepared by MFish with input from the Department of Conservation.

You are invited to comment on the proposed Operational Plan to manage the incidental capture of New Zealand sea lions in the southern squid trawl fishery (SQU 6T) for the 2005-06 Fishing Year, in accordance with s 12(1) of the Fisheries Act 1996.

All comments on the Plan must be received by *Friday, 19 August 2005*, and should be sent to Paul Creswell, Senior Fisheries Analyst, Ministry of Fisheries, Private Bag 14, Nelson, or faxed to (03) 545 7799, or emailed to creswelp@fish.govt.nz.

All these submissions will be publicly available under the Official Information Act 1982. Should you wish information contained in your submission to be withheld under the Act, the grounds for withholding this information must be provided in your submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Benson-Pope', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hon David Benson-Pope
Minister of Fisheries

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