



SOUTHERN SEABIRD SOLUTIONS

Conservation through Cooperation

**Newsletter Six
December 2004**

Our Goal: Southern Seabird Solutions promotes the adoption of fishing practices that avoid mortality of southern hemisphere seabirds.

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Merry Christmas

Hello everyone,

I hope you're all planning to relax over the Christmas/New Year holiday season – I'm looking forward to spending Christmas with my family here in Wellington.

The past year has been an extremely busy and hectic one for

Southern Seabird Solutions. We've managed to achieve a lot; you can read about some of our successes – and those of other people and organisations – in this, our latest newsletter.

I hope you and your families all have a happy and safe Christmas and New Year. I wish you all the best, and look forward to working with you all in 2005.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janice Molloy". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Janice Molloy
Convenor, Southern Seabird Solutions
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Change In The Wind For South Africa's Seabirds

Things are certainly looking up for the seabirds of South Africa. When South African Seabird Advisory Officer Samantha Petersen returned

home to Cape Town recently, she took with her a Kiwi-designed and built tori line, to aid her in her war on seabird deaths.

Of the estimated 20,000 seabirds killed by South Africa's domestic fisheries, the largest proportion by far is made up of the shy albatross – a species that breeds in New Zealand, and has been classified 'near threatened'.

And although the South African authorities are committed to reducing such seabird by-catch – a National Plan of Action for longline fisheries is being finalised, and fishing permits require seabird by-catch mitigation measures – the challenge is putting official policy into practice.

This is where dedicated officers like Samantha come in. Having completed a whirlwind tour of some of New Zealand's fishing fleets, and seeing first-hand how bird-scaring lines work on the water, Samantha has returned home to take up the challenge. Her job now is to work with the fishers – in much the same way as Southern Seabird Solutions does here in New Zealand. "It's no good talking to each other – until we talk with fishers, we won't get anywhere," she says.

After seeing the steps taken by Kiwi fishers and companies, however, Samantha was able to return home feeling very optimistic, saying it was "amazing and encouraging to see how proactive fishermen are here in New Zealand."

A Day At The Pub With Southern Seabird Solutions

In September, Southern Seabird Solutions took its message to the pub – three pubs to be exact. The SSS Portside Workshops – short, informal workshops for inshore longline fishers – aimed to share information about techniques used on local vessels to cut bird by-catch, and other techniques being tested here and overseas.

Held in Houhora, Leigh and Mangonui, the three workshops lured as many as 50 fishers – with the largest school attending the Mangonui meeting. "We expected four or five people," said SSS Convenor Janice Malloy. "But they kept coming through the door until there were about 20. We were delighted to see such interest."

Janice talked about what makes seabird populations so vulnerable to even small increases in mortality rates, while the fishers explained what they were doing and what they felt worked.

Feedback indicated that, overall, longline snapper fishers are becoming increasingly aware of seabird mitigation – and have practices in place – but still found the Workshops a useful forum in which to raise the topic again and share ideas.

Slick Experiment Moving Along

Following on from Leigh fisherman Alex Aitken's prize in the

BirdLife International ‘Competition of Ideas’ award, Johanna Pierre and Wendy Norden have been tipping oil into the ocean – but not just any old oil; fish oil.

Earlier this year, Alex Aitken – a longline skipper of 24 years – won a share of BirdLife International’s first prize with his idea of dripping fish oil behind his vessel in a bid to reduce the number of seabirds becoming caught and killed on his hooks.

The idea is that fish oil dripped into the water behind the vessel forms a bio-degradable slick – deterring birds for enough time to allow baited hooks to sink beyond their reach. And it seems to work: the technique has allowed Alex to set his baits during the day, without catching seabirds.

From all angles, the idea seems a simple, cheap, easy to use and effective means of reducing the risks of longline fishing to seabirds – with Alex claiming that the technique allowed him to reduce the number of seabirds he caught by as much as 95 percent. That said, more experimentation was needed to ensure that the method is, indeed, harmless to birds – enter the Department of Conservation.

“We went to the Leigh area for preliminary trials and used the fish oil provided by Alex Aitken,” says Scientific Officers of DOC’s Conservation Services Programme Johanna Pierre.

She, fellow officer Wendy Norden, and CSP Snapper Advisory Officer Grant Johnson measured the result of the fish oil against those of vegetable oil and seawater. “We based our results on the numbers of dives [by

seabirds] into the fish oil, vegetable oil, and seawater,” Johanna said. “And the fish oil technique appears to have a very strong deterrent effect on the birds.”

The vegetable oil proved to be no deterrent to the birds at all – leading Johanna and Wendy to believe that it is not so much the appearance of the oil on the water that repels the birds but, rather, the smell. She is quick to point out, however, that not all species are deterred. “The fish oil worked to deter most of the birds around on the day – mainly Flesh-Footed Shearwaters,” she says. “But it had little or no effect on some – such as Black-Backed Gulls and Storm Petrels.”

Johanna also emphasises that analysis of the tests is still incomplete and, so, the fish oil cannot be said to be categorically effective.

The next stage of tests is planned for February. “We’ll use a similar set up, but under normal fishing practices, like using longlines,” Johanna says.

Kiwi Know-How Set To Enhance French Success

Over the past year, the seven-strong French longline toothfish fleet based out of Reunion Island has managed to cut the number of seabirds it kills by 80 percent.

And, soon, a little Kiwi know-how may help them reduce that number even further.

New Zealand Longline Manager and Southern Seabird Solutions

Management Committee Member Malcolm McNeill spent five days in Reunion Island talking to French sea captains – sharing the knowledge, equipment and techniques that Kiwi autoline longliners have developed to stop catching seabirds.

His visit was the result of last year's meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, where concern was raised at the high levels of seabird by-catch being reported for the French exclusive economic zone – 25,841 seabirds killed, mostly white-chinned petrels, between September 2001 and August 2003.

Among the Commission Working Group's recommendations was a fisher exchange between France and New Zealand – meaning that Malcolm ended up on Reunion Island, a veritable French-governed paradise situated 250 kilometres South-West of Mauritius.

Malcolm considers the exchange a success – with at least one French captain eager to visit a New Zealand boat to observe Kiwi methods – and says the next step is for Southern Seabird Solutions to remain in contact with Reunion Island-based companies, to keep them updated on developments and help them to feel a part of the wider longline fishery.

Malcolm also believes that it is imperative that Reunion Island fishers be recognised for their efforts, and for the tremendous reduction in seabird by-catch they have already achieved, to help them remain committed to reducing the numbers of seabirds killed even further.

“It's very important to recognise the massive inroads the seven-vessel fleet has made over the past year. They've come a long way – an 80 percent reduction is huge, and they're willing to do more.”

Snap It, Don't Catch It – SSS Seabird Photo Competition

Southern Seabird Solutions is inviting budding New Zealand photographers to enter its 'Seabird Photo Competition'.

“We've noticed that a lot of fishermen take cameras to sea with them, and many of them are very good photographers,” says Southern Seabird Solutions Convenor Janice Molloy. “We want to encourage them to observe seabirds in their natural environment, and to be more aware of the birds that follow their vessels.”

The Southern Seabird Solutions 'Seabird Photo Competition' is open to all New Zealand commercial fishermen – skippers, crews and families.

Prizes include a trip for two to a tropical destination, a camera, T-shirts and more.

All entries must be received before the end of March 2005, and winners will be announced at Southern Seabird Solutions Annual General Meeting in June 2005.

SSS Seabird By-Catch Avoidance Award

Each year, Southern Seabird Solutions will present its 'Seabird By-Catch Avoidance Award' to individuals, vessels or companies who have made positive and/or innovative contributions to fishing practices that avoid catching seabirds.

The bronze, granite and wood trophy will be awarded annually at the SSS AGM, for contributions made during the previous fishing year (Oct 1-Sep 30), and nominations will close with the secretary of SSS by January 31 in any calendar year.

All nominations must describe how the person/vessel/company has made a significant contribution to reducing seabird capture, and all nominations will be considered by the SSS Management Committee – or a sub-committee of that committee. A recommendation will then be made to the SSS Trustees, who will confirm and announce the award.

Winners will receive the trophy for a year, a framed SSS certificate stating the name of the award and a brief description of the contribution they have made to by-catch avoidance. The recipient's name will be engraved on the trophy plaque before it is awarded.

Finally, the winning contribution will be written up and promoted within the New Zealand industry through publication of an informative article in

the SEAFOOD magazine edition following the SSS AGM.

New Display At Taiaroa Head

Southern Seabird Solutions has received sponsorship to design, build and install a new interactive display for the Royal Albatross Centre, situated at the foot of the Taiaroa Head.

Unique for its diversity of wildlife, Taiaroa Head includes the world's only mainland colony of albatrosses – a colony which has slowly grown since the first albatross chick took flight from the Head in 1938.

The Royal Albatross Centre receives hordes of visitors each year, both from New Zealand and around the world. Now – thanks to display sponsors Sanford Ltd, WWF New Zealand and eco-tourism company OceanWings – these visitors will also have an opportunity to learn about Southern Seabird Solutions.

Through this interactive display, visitors will learn about the migratory nature of seabirds, as well ask questions of those involved the issues: fishermen, scientists, environmental groups and the Government.

The display is expected to be completed and operational by mid-February 2005.

New Role For Dave Kreutz

Southern Seabird Solutions would like to congratulate Management

Committee member Dave Kreutz for his appointment to the position of SeaNet Extension Officer.

Dave has long been at the forefront of efforts to change fishing practices and attitudes to reduce the numbers of seabirds killed by fishermen. As a tuna fisherman on the eastern coast of Australia, he worked hard to reduce the numbers of flesh-footed shearwaters being caught.

Dave has galvanised fellow yellowfin fishers to come up with solutions to the problem, saying, “We have to educate people and get them to come up with solutions. In the education process we have to give ownership of the problem to all parties – from the first time deckie, to the 30-year skipper – and we have to have the ongoing technical support to help people learn and do whatever is required to solve the problem.”

ACAP’s First Meeting

There was a strong sense of co-operation at ACAP’s (the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels) first meeting in Hobart last month.

The meeting was attended by five parties: New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Spain and the UK; three signatories: Argentina, Brazil and France; and three range states: Namibia, Norway and the US.

Meeting attendees discussed an emergency criterion to define emergency situations for albatrosses and petrels and assign responsibility for action;

established an advisory committee to provide advice to the meeting of parties; and prioritised for implementation areas of the ACAP action plan.

To date, six parties have ratified the ACAP agreement – Australia, Ecuador, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain and the UK. The meeting was informed that the issue is currently being considered by the respective Parliaments of Argentina, Brazil and France. The next session of the Meeting of the Parties of ACAP will be held late in 2006.

If you’d like to find out more about Southern Seabird Solutions or be involved in any of our projects, please feel free to contact me.

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