

BirdLife speaks out on New Zealand seabird by-catch

Title

BirdLife International has joined forces with its New Zealand Partner Forest & Bird to remind their government there of its responsibilities towards reducing the toll of seabirds in the country's fisheries. New Zealand's Ministry of Fisheries recently released a draft seabird by-catch policy to replace a National Plan of Action for Seabirds.

The draft policy offers no concrete steps to reduce the by-catch of seabirds, which in a risk assessment report done for the ministry is estimated at between 22,200 and 40,900 annually within New Zealand's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The risk assessment estimates 21 of the 64 seabird species examined are at risk from the level of incidental by-catch. BirdLife International and Forest & Bird made a joint submission to the ministry on the draft policy.

BirdLife International's Global Seabird Programme head Dr Ben Sullivan said: "New Zealand has an international responsibility to develop a National Plan of Action to reduce seabird by-catch in its fisheries". The most at risk species is the endemic Parkinson's Petrel *Procellaria parkinsoni* - classified as Vulnerable by BirdLife on behalf of the IUCN Red List - with the average number of potential annual fishing-related fatalities estimated to be nearly ten times higher than the level that can be sustained without risking extinction.

Although some gains have been made in deep sea fishing through mandatory mitigation measures, inshore fisheries do not require mandatory mitigation, observer coverage is low and potentially large numbers of albatrosses, petrels, king shags and spotted shags may be killed. Squid trawling near the Sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands not only directly kills New Zealand sea lions but also competes for their food and this is believed to have contributed to the halving of the number of pups since 1998.

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