# Plan to save New Zealand seabirds heralds changes to fishing practises

Title
Forest & Bird (BirdLife in New Zealand) is welcoming the release of a government-approved statement of intent to save native seabirds, including endangered albatrosses and petrels, from being killed by commercial and non-commercial fishing activity.

The National Plan of Action for Seabirds (NPOAS) has been released by the Ministry for Primary Industries. Forest & Bird was part of the stakeholders' committee that formulated the NPOAS, along with representatives of the fishing industry.

The latest assessment estimates that over 15,000 seabirds die annually from coming into contact with commercial fishing operations inside New Zealand's Exclusive Economic Zone alone.

Six species in the new risk assessment are considered to be at "very high risk" from fishing activity, including the Flesh-footed Shearwater.

"Forest & Bird is pleased that the Minister for Primary Industries has decided that an initial priority is to create a species-specific action plan for the black petrel. This species only breeds on Great Barrier and Little Barrier islands, and is at risk from commercial and recreational fishers, particularly in the Hauraki Gulf," says Forest & Bird's Seabird Advocate, Karen Baird.

Forest & Bird believes it should be standard practice for bottom longliners to use weighted lines, which quickly sink beyond the reach of diving birds. Forest & Bird says it is also important that fish waste and unused baits are not thrown overboard while fishing, so as to reduce the risk of birds swallowing hooks.

"Most New Zealanders don't realise that we have more native seabirds than landbirds that breed only in New Zealand," says Karen Baird. "Every one of New Zealand's 10 endemic albatross species is under severe threat from the fishing industry. These birds are as unique to this country as Tui and Kakapo, and New Zealanders would want to see them protected as much as is possible.

"It should also be remembered that for every albatross or petrel that dies there's a real chance that a chick will also die in a nest, waiting for one of its parents to return with food," Karen

Baird says.

“I am heartened that the industry and the Government have finally agreed that we have a major problem. Now that the plan has been approved we need some action. “There is a lot of hard work to come, to make sure that the plan’s goals, to protect seabirds, are met.

“This will require everyone involved in the industry to start acting responsibly, and start doing what is needed. If we don’t, we will lose a lot more of what makes New Zealand such a special place. But I am cautiously optimistic,” Karen Baird says.

Find out more about BirdLife's Global Seabird Programme