

Seabird Mitigation Research Update ? The Hook Pod

Title

BirdLife's Global Seabird Programme (GSP) is working with Fishtek to develop a 'hook pod' for pelagic longline fisheries that prevents seabirds from accessing baits before a pressure sensitive valve operates at a pre-determined depth to release baited hooks. The pod encapsulates the point and barb of baited hooks and is attached to the branchline so when it reaches a predetermined depth, the pod releases and the hooks fall free of the pod and sink to the desired fishing depth.

The new prototype pod has 60g of lead incorporated into the housing and so for the first 10m+ (until the pressure release valve is operated) the baited hook has 60g on the hook and time-depth-recorder data indicates that this sinks at twice the speed of standard fishing gear. This means that not only is the barb and point of the hook covered by the pod, but that the baited hook sinks close to the stern of the vessel at a rate that makes it difficult for most birds to access.

In December 2009, Ben Sullivan (GSP Coordinator) and Oli Yates (BirdLife's Albatross Task Force Coordinator) conducted at-sea trials in the eastern Australia tuna fishery. A range of bait types and hooking positions were trialled as well as investigations into the best methods of storing the pods to ensure an efficient setting and hauling operation.

The pod performed well under a variety of conditions and the crew found it simple to set, retrieve and store. This was very encouraging and the GSP are hoping to have a near final prototype for testing head-to-head against seabirds in mid 2010. For more details:

Ben.Sullivan@rspb.org.uk & www.fishtekmarine.com