

Southern Seabird Solutions Trustee Report

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NZ has more seabird species than any other country – in fact 86 different types of seabirds breed here. Although we are very privileged to have this diversity of seabirds in our waters, it also means fishing here is very challenging – one of the most challenging places in the world. In fact researchers like to trial their new seabird avoidance devices here – if it will work in NZ, it will work anywhere in the world.

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We've known that seabirds can be casualties of fishing for nearly 20 years, but in the early days, it was impossible to get the industry, government and NGOs around the table to constructively discuss solutions. There was a trench mentality on all sides.

This all changed in 2002 with the inaugural meeting of what was to become the Southern Seabird Solutions Trust. For the first time, parties listened to the needs of others – govt and NGOs heard that industry wanted recognition when they did well and an appreciation of their genuine desire to 'do the right thing'. NGOs wanted more acknowledgment of the issue from industry, and government needed the practical involvement of fishermen, who hold the solutions.

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Southern Seabird Solutions has gone from strength to strength since that day. We all leave our swords at the door, and work constructively. We are strong because of the wide membership. I am a Trustee and have been from day dot, along with Robin Hapi- Executive Chairman of Aotearoa Fisheries Ltd and Chairman of the Board of Sealord Group, Bill Mansfield – International legal advisor for MFAT, Chris Howe - WWF and Kevin O'Connor – DOC. It is supported financially by the Department of Conservation, and the fishing industry through the New Zealand Seafood Industry Council and the Deepwater Group Ltd. The Trust is also supported by WWF-New Zealand. Funding for the Trust's projects comes from a variety of sources, both within and outside New Zealand.

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The premise of Southern Seabird Solutions is that fishermen hold the answers. We also know that fishermen listen to their peers before they listen to anyone else. So Southern Seabird Solutions uses role model fishermen to spread the message that responsible fishermen don't catch seabirds.

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If trends continue, New Zealand will be defined internationally by its sustainable produce and our reputation for our focus on environmentally sound business practice, in the same way that our nuclear free status defines us as a country today.

Reputation is crucial to our industry – as it is for any business. Our high quality, sustainably caught fish products are sought after by a marketplace that has the time, money and conscience to be particular. It is critical that we

maintain our market edge. Buyers are increasingly asking for more than sustainably managed fish stocks – they also want proof that our fishing practices are sustainable and that we operate in an environmentally responsible way.

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However, I don't want to imply that we're only concerned about the bottom line and our behaviours are driven simply by market demand. Yes – it's true that we can and will respond quickly to commercial imperatives. But I don't want to perpetuate the myth that fishermen and fishing companies are somehow a different species. We are just as human. We have a conscience and the desire to minimise the impact that we have on our environment is just as strong in fishermen - perhaps stronger.

After all, fishermen, especially, are the people who are out there physically sharing this environment. With a great respect for it.

However, there are still challenges to be met. Some of these challenges seem intractable and will need perseverance and thinking outside the box. Others however, are more straightforward, protecting seabirds during fishing, for example, is one of the simpler issues to solve. Practical and low cost solutions exist, and we've already made good headway in NZ.

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The greatest progress has been made to date in those fisheries that have a strong central governance structure. Shining examples often quoted over recent years are the JV tuna fleet operated by Solander, the Ling Autoline fleet and the NZ toothfish fleet.

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In these three fleets, the company or coordinating body:

- sets clear mitigation standards for each vessel to meet
- rigorously abides with regulations at all times
- provides training and education
- carries out self reporting
- has a philosophy of constant improvement

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We have a 4th fleet that has in the past two years joined this high performing threesome – the Deepwater Trawl fleet. Although there are still some situations when seabirds are at risk in this fleet, the companies are focussed on finding ways to safeguard seabirds from the risks at these danger times. Industry can be very proud of the improvements made in this fishery.

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The inshore fisheries don't have the advantage of fleet wide management structures. Coordinated fleet-wide action is more difficult. Having said that, many owner operators and companies have taken responsibility for themselves and are putting measures in place on their own vessels. This is commendable.

However, we have yet to see a uniformly high standard of practice across inshore fleets. And as experience shows, whole fleets, let alone the whole industry are pulled down by poor performers. We all strive to bank the good news – it can take years to build up that ‘reputation account’ and one single, stupid, often unnecessary, incident can empty the reputation coffers in a flash. (Usually a news flash! On the front page. Which is where we do NOT want to be.)

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This is where the Southern Seabird Solutions Trust is helping. This groundbreaking alliance between the fishing industry, government and environmental NGOs is putting its energy into ensuring all vessels fishing in the southern hemisphere use seabird safe fishing practices.

A bold but perfectly achievable goal. Why is it achievable?

Because of the willingness of the fishermen, the men and women on the water, to make it work. This buy-in and commitment from the folks out there fishing is critical. It is an understanding of more than the commercial imperatives. It is knowing the cost of not doing the right thing and, importantly your conscience – your pride in what you do, how you do it and that the rest of us can see and respect that – which will make the difference.

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Because seabirds are long distance travellers, we need to work with other countries to help solve the problem internationally. I believe that if anyone is going to solve the problem internationally, it will be with the help of New Zealand fishermen.

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We've already shown this. Southern Seabird Solutions has organised four skipper exchanges over the last five years, so that NZ fishermen can share their ideas and techniques with fishermen in other countries. This photo shows NZ fisherman Dave Kellian on board a small longliner in Peru - a destination for many NZ seabirds. We've also worked in this way with Uruguay, Chile and France.

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I mentioned earlier that one of the industry's requests to government and NGOs is to be recognised for our efforts. Southern Seabird Solutions places regular stories in the SeaFOOD magazine reporting on the industry's achievements.

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It has established a Seabird Safe Award to profile companies that go the extra mile in addressing seabird bycatch. We also currently have a seabird photo competition open for those of you who have taken your camera to sea.

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Education is an important part of the work of Southern Seabird Solutions. Unless fishermen understand the impacts of their actions they are unlikely to change their behaviour. So, the Trust holds regular get togethers for fishermen and others both in NZ and abroad, to ensure people know the latest developments and to help build support for change. I know a number of you have taken part in these meetings and workshops.

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We've also produced a video in English and Spanish, and created a series of seabird factsheets for children in English and Maori.

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Advisory officers are an important way to support fishermen adapt to the new attitudes and approaches. Southern Seabird Solutions helped put the first advisory officer into the South African tuna fleet in 2003, and that advisory programme has since expanded to include their trawl fleet.

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Looking to the future, Southern Seabird Solutions is keen to help inshore fleets achieve fleet wide seabird safe practices. Whatever interventions the government makes, there will always be a need to support fishermen through training, information, and recognition for their efforts. We also intend working with the recreational fishing sector to help them start taking some simple steps to safeguard our seabirds.

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Overseas, South Africa continues to be a high priority – the NZ white capped albatross that breeds on the Auckland Islands is the most commonly caught seabird in South Africa. Because our fishing methods are similar we can work together, not re-inventing the wheel but leveraging our joint knowledge and experience. We are currently attempting to set up an industry exchange with a New Zealander heading over there to look at their operations and pass on what we've learnt here.

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Another project on the Trust's books is establishing a simple step-by-step process for fishermen and other inventors when they have a new mitigation idea. We've had a number of situations in the past where people have developed prototype ideas that have great potential. Sadly they tend to fizzle out, because inventors don't know who to talk to or how to fund the development.

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The Southern Seabird Solutions partnership model has a lot going for it and could be used to solve other environmental issues. It relies on trust, development of a common goal, and a real willingness by all parties to listen to each other and accommodate each other's needs. Environmentalism is an evolution, not a war. If the industry and New Zealand primary producers as a whole wish to strengthen our sustainable brand image, we need to get better at working together. Thank you.

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Photo credits

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Lets just look at some numbers in two fisheries – the trawl squid fishery and the ling bottom longline fishery. The numbers speak for themselves. These reductions are driven by fishermen acting responsibly and accepting that there are steps that can be taken to minimise the impacts of fishing. Over that period the total spend by the Trust has totalled \$450,000 – funds that

have all been raised voluntarily and from both industry and environmental organisations working together for the same objective.

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Thank you.