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Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

THE NEW ZEALAND SEAFOOD  
INDUSTRY COUNCIL LTD



MINISTRY OF FISHERIES  
Te Tautiaki i nga tini a Tangaroa

# REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL FISHERS' FORUM

AUCKLAND  
NEW ZEALAND

6-9<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2000

## **INTRODUCTION**

In November 2000 New Zealand hosted an international meeting for fishers to discuss ways to solve the incidental capture of albatrosses and petrels in longline fishing operations. The primary purpose of the meeting was to bring fishermen and fishing industries from different geographical areas together to exchange ideas on the most effective ways of catching fish without catching seabirds. It was also hoped that such a meeting would motivate individuals from different parts of the globe to begin collaborating more, to accelerate progress in finding more effective solutions.

Because States are expected to start implementing their National Plan of Action – Seabirds in early 2001, it was considered important that information on the best and most up to date mitigation measures was shared, as well as information on effective advocacy and education programmes and other initiatives relating to the issue.

## **VENUE AND TIMING**

The Forum was held at the Heritage Hotel in Auckland, New Zealand on the 6<sup>th</sup> –9<sup>th</sup> November 2000.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Around 80 people attended the four day meeting, and representatives from 15 different geographical regions attended. Around one half of the participants were either fishers or fishing industry representatives. Seabird biologists, population modellers, government officials, fishing gear manufacturers, at sea observers, FAO and IUCN made up the other half of the participants.

## **SPONSORS**

The Fishers Forum was jointly organised by the New Zealand government and the New Zealand fishing industry. Funding to hold the Forum was obtained through sponsorship. The major sponsor was the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Other sponsors included New Zealand government agencies, international agencies including FAO and IUCN, gear manufacturers and fishing industry associations.

## **REPORTING**

Proceedings from the Forum will be produced in early 2001. These will include executive summaries of all presentations, summaries of discussion, and the agreed outcomes from the Forum.

## **THE FORUM PROGRAMME**

The programme was structured so that there was a high level of participation. For many people, particularly the fishermen present, it was the first time they had delivered presentations to a group. Despite this, the quality and standard of presentation was high. Spanish and Portuguese translation was provided.

Ambassador Satya Nandan, Secretary General of the International Seabird Authority opened the Forum, and in his keynote address traced the changing emphasis of international fisheries law from one of food provision, to the current focus on sustainable use and conservation of marine ecosystems. Ambassador Nandan encouraged the global longline fishing industry to act now and solve the problem themselves, rather than waiting for national or international authorities to impose mandatory measures.

The remainder of the first day was spent on scene setting presentations. Topics included an overview of seabird ecology, the application of population modeling, and management approaches to solving the incidental capture of seabirds.

The most productive session on the first day featured short reports from each longlining country represented at the Forum on their fisheries and the nature of the seabird interaction with their vessels. Much of this information was presented publicly for the first time and will be reproduced in the proceedings. A number of themes became evident from the presentations:

- Each country is at a different stage in addressing the issue of seabird bycatch and support for those that are only just beginning will accelerate progress. This may be government to government; industry to industry or individual to individual.
- Different fishing fleets use different mitigation measures, and this is often related to the economy of the fishery.
- IUU fishing is a serious threat to seabirds and must be combated.
- Education is essential and there are several tools available.

On day two, three population modelers presented the results of modeling exercises they have carried out to assess the influence of fishing on seabird populations. This was followed by a panel discussion during which modelers stressed that because albatross are long-lived and slow-reproducing species, they are especially vulnerable to bycatch, even at low rates. Population declines may take some years to detect and recovery may take many years, even in the complete absence of further by-catch. Endangered species of seabirds may require closer attention than more abundant species. Better (and more integrated) data on the distribution of seabirds and fishing effort in space and time is an urgent requirement, both to better inform fishers and also to develop management responses.

In the afternoon four fishers reported on mitigation measures they used on their vessels. This included underwater setting of pelagic lines, line weighting of both pelagic and demersal lines, paired streamer lines, boom operated streamer lines, and sonic guns. Further discussion of mitigation measures occurred in two working groups (a demersal fishing working group and pelagic fishing working group). Measures most acceptable to fishers were identified and a list of research priorities for these was developed in this session.

The third day opened with a presentation on the types of behaviour that make seabirds vulnerable to capture on longlines. This led into a discussion on potential problems that still need to be resolved before particular mitigation measures become acceptable. Issues such as crew safety and interference with the fishing operation were identified as requiring more attention. Additional research priorities were identified as a result of this discussion.

A number of researchers then reported on experiments that have recently been carried out on new mitigation measures. These included integrated line weighting, underwater setting, and blue dyed bait.

On the final day, various people reported on advocacy and education programmes that had been undertaken in different countries. This led into an interesting interactive presentation on effective ways to change peoples' behaviour. Finally, a set of agreed outcomes were developed in small working groups and individuals and country representatives committed to undertaking specific pieces of work and reporting back.

### **OUTCOMES FROM THE FORUM**

The Forum exceeded expectations, and participants have resolved to hold a second International Fishers Forum in two years time, with Hawaii provisionally set as the venue. The primary purpose of the second Forum will be to ensure that the momentum created at the first Forum is maintained. Countries will report on progress made in the intervening two years, and countries that were not represented at the first Forum will be encouraged to attend.

One of the most important outcomes was the sense of community that immediately formed during the first day, and the collective ownership of the issue that resulted from this. It was clear that all of the participants were at the Forum with a common purpose. Open and frank sharing of information without fear of retribution occurred throughout the four days.

Individuals, fishing companies, fishing gear manufacturers and government representatives made a commitment to undertake specific projects over the next two years. These included a range of goals from collection of bycatch data, self policing by fishing companies, setting catch limits, holding training workshops, sharing information between neighboring countries, and testing of new mitigation measures. Innovative ideas included giving fishing masters Mustad caps for returning bird bands, and including a clause about use of particular mitigation measures in skippers' contracts.

The key point participants acknowledged was that each of them was in a position to make a unique contribution because of their position, their contacts and their role in the issue. The group as a whole has committed to keep in contact through a listserver and report on progress over the next two years.

The closing statement by Ambassador Nandan (Appendix 1) recounts the significant progress made over the four days of the Forum.

**APPENDIX 1****INTERNATIONAL FISHERS FORUM CLOSING SPEECH****AMBASSADOR SATYA NANDAN**

First, I should like to commend all the presenters for the quality and quantity of the information provided and all of you participants for your hard work.

In my opening address on Monday, I remarked on the unique nature of this event, particularly the involvement of fishers, researchers, representatives of various international agencies and government officials. I urged you to think about how you would take back to your own countries the lessons that you would learn from being together, and to consider carefully the tools you would need to spread the key messages to your own fleet. I have found myself undertaking a similar exercise in preparation for returning to the United Nations.

For me, one of the most memorable things has been the active and highly constructive role that has been played over the last few days by the fishers. One of the most important messages for me has been that there are several simple, inexpensive and effective ways in which the by-catch of seabirds on longlines can be greatly reduced. The willingness of some fishers to share their experiences with others that may not be aware of these simple mitigation measures is extremely encouraging. A range of possible approaches have been discussed, and although the specific mix may vary from fishery to fishery, it seems to be clear that a combination of mitigation measures will be most effective in reducing seabird mortalities. Each of you therefore needs to consider what will work best in your own situations, and, if necessary, how to persuade your colleagues to adopt at least the most simple mitigation measures and how to refine and improve on the basic procedures.

Another very encouraging feature of this meeting has been the call by numerous speakers for a "Bottom-up" approach, in which the fishers and researchers take the initiative in deciding how to achieve significant reductions in seabird by-catch, instead of waiting for national or international authorities to impose "Top-down" solutions. Ownership of a problem by stakeholders, and the development of voluntary steps to address it, will always be a better way forward than the imposition of compulsory regulations that often cannot be effectively enforced.

There is, however, one important area in which governments of the international community must act decisively and in unison, and that is to eliminate IUU fishing, and I can assure you all that I shall be carrying that message back to my colleagues in the UN and other fora.

I have also been impressed by the progress that has been made by some countries represented here in developing their National Plans of Action to mitigate seabird by-catch. This would be a logical and necessary follow-up of the FAO Plan of Action. I hope that in addition to the usual donor sources, organisations such as FAO and GEF can help to provide the funding that will allow developing countries to begin developing their own Plans. This will be greatly facilitated by the active assistance of

many of you in this room. Transfer of information and technology is important not only for mitigation development, but also for the establishment and administration of observer programmes. As you have all recognised, there is also a need for ongoing research and monitoring.

I was particularly pleased that as a group you have identified the following three key areas of future work:

- implementation of mitigation measures;
- research programmes; and
- advocacy and education.

These have also been identified as key areas in the FAO Plan. The great challenge that you will all be facing when you leave Auckland is how to keep up the momentum that has been created in the past four days. The working groups that have been proposed are essential if the sound proposals that have been elaborated are to be implemented. I am delighted that you are all enthusiastic about meeting again in the next few years to review progress, and I hope that one of the participating countries here will offer to host the next meeting. In the meantime, I urge you to keep your governments well informed about your work programmes. Through them, the international community will also be kept advised, and the deliberations of the United Nations and its various agencies, especially the FAO, will be better informed.

On behalf of all the participants, I would like to thank the organisers of this very successful Forum. We have all appreciated very much the efficient manner in which the proceedings have been conducted. We thank you in particular for the very warm hospitality that has been accorded to us.

Finally, I wish you all a safe journey home and hope that you will keep everyone advised of your ongoing efforts to make the world's oceans safer for seabirds. One way of doing this is through reports to the FAO and in the reports of the UN Secretary-General on Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea. I shall return to my own responsibilities greatly encouraged by your resolve and commitment and the example you are setting to the world.