



Threat danger reduced for New Zealand sea lions

Amidst the gloom on species threats, there is better news on sea lions.

The latest Department of Conservation marine mammal threat status has removed the New Zealand sea lions from its nationally critical list.

Whilst still seen as threatened, sea lions have been rated a two-step improvement to a new status of nationally vulnerable.

The DOC threat status classification has three stages under the “threatened” category – nationally critical at the most extreme, with nationally endangered and then nationally vulnerable as the lesser marks.

The more favourable “at risk” category is rated under two stages – recovering and then naturally uncommon.

A final category is “not threatened”.

The department assesses the threat status of the country’s plant and animal life every five years, including the risk of extinction based on abundance and population trends.

The other major positive moves concerned right whales, once hunted to near extinction, and Hector’s dolphins.

Right whales, like sea lions, have been accorded a two-step improvement to nationally vulnerable status.

Hector’s dolphins have improved from nationally endangered to nationally vulnerable.

Their population has been estimated at close to 15,000 although the review panel was faced with conflicting evidence on the level of decline in the 40-year period to 2015.

Maui dolphins remain on the nationally critical list with a population of less than 100.

Significant decline is still a risk over the next three generations due to uncertainty in remaining threat from overlap with fisheries and diseases such as toxoplasmosis.

However, recent DNA-based abundance estimates, and demographic modelling indicate the

population may have stabilised and may be growing.

A revised threat management plan is due next month.

The main breeding ground for sea lions is the wild and inhospitable Auckland Islands, 460km south of Bluff, where there are three colonies.

There is also a substantial colony on Campbell Island and for the first time in 150 years a colony has established on mainland New Zealand – at Stewart Island.

On the Auckland Islands, 1758 pups were born last summer, with another 704 on Campbell.

The Deepwater Group has been supporting researchers on Campbell in combatting the high mortality caused by pups falling into naturally occurring coastal mud holes and pools and becoming trapped.

Fisheries risks are actively managed and closely monitored.

Fisheries New Zealand have an Operational Plan to manage sea lion risks in the southern squid trawl fishery.

This includes requirements to have a minimum of 70 percent government observer coverage of the fishery (with around 90 percent coverage typically achieved) and for vessels to deploy sea lion exclusion devices (escape holes in the top of the trawl).

This strictly enforced management regime has greatly reduced captures in the fishery, now averaging only two per year with near complete observer coverage.

DOC's Sea Lion Threat Management Plan recognises a range of threats facing sea lions, both natural and from man, and the concerted and ongoing efforts from all to manage these provides optimism for their future.



Blenheim photographer's wild southern fishing trip

Blenheim-based photographer Tamzin Henderson grabbed the chance to go on a toothfishing vessel to the South Atlantic. She wrote about her challenging experience for Stuff.

In November 2018, I read that Argos Froyanes Ltd had launched two new vessels for toothfishing in the Ross Sea.

Argos Georgia and *Nordic Prince* are state of the art long-liners, sitting at 54 metres long and taking a crew of around 25 staff.

Designed with the safety of the crew in mind, the vessels use a moon pool in the hull to haul the toothfish in, they are ice strengthened and have incredibly modern technology.

Fascinated with the new vessels, I contacted Argos to see whether they would consider taking a photographer on board and in early January 2019 I was completely blown away to receive a reply – would I like to join the *Argos Georgia* on a three-week research fishing trip to the South Sandwich Islands in the south Atlantic Ocean?

I had a mad dash to complete my Personal Survival Training (Thanks Peter from the Westport Deep Sea Fishing School for being so accommodating) before flying to the Falkland Islands, via Auckland, Santiago, and Punta Arenas, Chile.

I was on board to photograph the crew, the fishing, and the beautiful scenery. The opportunity was a dream come true as *Argos Georgia* is the nicest vessel, fishing or passenger, that I have ever been on, but as it turned out it was also the biggest challenge I have ever faced, starting with the rope ladder to climb on board.

We sailed from Stanley, Falkland Islands, for two days down to King Edward Point, South Georgia for our inspection.

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and the South Georgia Government have specific requirements to be met which meant the inspection included everything from checking hooks and tori lines, to flares, immersion suits and our fishing plans.

In such a wild and valuable area, no chances would be taken. After passing our inspection we headed south to the fishing grounds near South Sandwich and the Antarctic Peninsula.

Our research quota allowed for six lines to be set and for a certain number of fish to be tagged and released. The observer, Felix, was on hand for the process.

Despite medication, the seasickness was debilitating. On the bad days, which there were several, I watched the world go by from my cabin window, wishing I could hold my stomach long enough to be on the bridge or down with the crew.

On the calm days I photographed icebergs, whales and seabirds from the deck. One of the noticeable differences on board *Argos Georgia* was the distinct lack of birds around the ship compared to any other vessel I have seen or been on board.

Due to the moon pool hauling fish through the hull, the regulation of offal discharge and the bird mitigation devices, the seabirds were just not interested in our vessel. This is a huge breakthrough when seabird by-catch is an industry concern, and significant time and financial resource has been invested into improving statistics

As part of my brief, I ventured down to the factory where I watched the observers tagging and releasing tooth fish, and the crew setting lines, preparing and packing fish to freeze.

All processes on board *Argos Georgia* happen below deck so even in the roughest conditions the crew are safe. After working their shifts hauling and packing these massive fish, the crew relaxed in the mess to fantastic meals prepared by the cook - think toothfish, fresh warm bread, and apple tarte tatin for dessert.

The conditions on *Argos Georgia* were the best I have ever seen on a fishing vessel, and it made for a very happy crew and a great environment.



News

The Herald reports that the SPATnz programme is a contender for an innovation award at the KiwiNet Awards being held in August.

Mussel farming has relied entirely upon unimproved, wild-caught juveniles or "spat" however that situation has now changed thanks to Cawthron, Sanford and SPATnz's development of selective breeding and large scale spat production for Greenshell mussel.

With support from the Ministry for Primary Industries Primary Growth Partnership, New Zealand's first commercial mussel hatchery was developed by SPATnz at the Cawthron Aquaculture Park in Nelson, and now spawns over two billion eggs each month.

Cawthron's MBIE-funded Cultured Shellfish programme developed the fundamentals of the selective breeding programme in anticipation of hatchery spat production.

Sanford created its subsidiary SPATnz, and partnered with Cawthron to form BreedCo Ltd.

Selectively bred spat almost halved the growing time of wild mussels and are more efficient to process.

Breeds specialised for anti-inflammatory activity and other new traits represented a massive future opportunity.

The innovation is nominated in the PwC Commercial Impact category.



New Zealand Seafood Industry
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2019 Conference programme confirmed

Registrations for the 2019 New Zealand Seafood Industry Conference and Technical Day are open and the [programme](#) has now been posted.

Seafood New Zealand has negotiated accommodation rates at the conference venue and neighbouring hotels. Please note, there are now a limited number of rooms available at the [Rydges hotel](#), so be in quick to secure remaining accommodation and flights. Bookings can be made through the [information](#) section on the conference webpage along with [links](#) to Air New Zealand for group flight bookings.

[Register now.](#)

Seafood Stars Awards

The 2019 Seafood Stars Awards are open for nominations. The awards are a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our industry people and their achievements. This year's award categories include:

- Future Development and Innovation Award
- Young Achiever Award
- Longstanding Service Award

For more information on each category [visit our website](#), or [download the form](#) to nominate someone today.



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