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Media release

WORKSHOPS PROMOTE SEABIRD-SMART FISHING PRACTICES

The first in a series of national workshops to promote seabird-smart fishing practices have been held in Auckland and Timaru.

The workshops are organised by Southern Seabird Solutions (www.southernseabirds.org) and hosted by fishing companies to educate inshore commercial fishers about the issue of fishing-related seabird injuries or death.

Southern Seabird Solutions Convenor Janice Molloy says seabirds have learned to forage for food at the back of trawl and longline fishing vessels, which places them at risk of being caught on hooks or tangled in trawl gear.

“The fishing industry has been actively working to address this issue for some time now as a partner of Southern Seabird Solutions, and the seabird-smart workshops are the next step in that work,” says Janice Molloy.

As well as providing information about the issue, she hopes the workshops will motivate fishers to share their own knowledge about what proven or new methods they use to keep seabirds away from fishing vessels, and inspire them to make further changes on their boats.

“The people attending these workshops are from small inshore boats that typically have a skipper and two or three crew members, so what they do on their boats to keep seabirds out of harm’s way will make a real difference,” she says.

At least six seabird-smart fishing workshops will be held around the country this year, with the first two held in Auckland and Timaru this month. The content of each workshop is being tailored to the needs of the particular fishing fleet attending, and will typically cover information on local seabirds, the latest developments in seabird-smart fishing practices, how to care for seabirds if they are caught, and benefits for the fishing industry of being seabird-smart.

Fishing company Sanford Ltd hosted the Auckland workshop, which was attended by about 25 skippers and crew contracted to Sanford, and Talley’s Group Ltd hosted the workshop in Timaru.

Sanford Ltd spokesperson Jim Fitzgerald says: “Sanford takes this issue very seriously. For instance we have a company-wide policy in place requiring all of the inshore trawl skippers who fish for us to use particular measures to keep seabirds away from their vessels.”

The skipper of the San Kaipara long-line fishing vessel, Stu Sheard, says: “I enjoyed the workshop, especially learning about the cycle the birds create from eating at sea, fertilising the land in the form of guano, and the run-off feeding the plankton and therefore feeding the whole food chain.”

Meanwhile, Talley’s spokesman Doug Loder says: “We want to build the public’s confidence that the fishing industry is acting responsibly towards seabirds. The workshops are an important step

towards this. Once skippers and crew have been through the training, the Southern Seabird Solutions Trust can maintain contact with them and provide any support where needed.”

Janice Molloy says two skippers have modified the devices they’re using to keep seabirds away from their boats as a result of attending the Auckland workshop.

“This is exactly what we hoped would happen. Seabird-smart fishing makes good sense because it’s practical, helps keep seabirds safe, and it doesn’t get in the way of achieving a good catch.”

She says Southern Seabird Solutions will keep in touch with workshop participants and can offer support and advice to fishers wanting to learn more or test particular seabird-smart practices to measure their effectiveness.

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This project is sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the New Zealand Seafood Industry Council, the Department of Conservation and Sanford Ltd. Southern Seabird Solutions Trust is an alliance including representatives from the seafood industry, New Zealand government, WWF and Te Ohu Kaimoana, that takes a cooperative approach to seabird conservation.

For more information about Southern Seabird Solutions visit www.southernseabirds.org or email info@southernseabirds.org.