



**Meeting:** Conservation Services Programme Research Advisory Group

**Date:** 25 February 2016

**Time:** 9:30 am – 1:30 pm

**Place:** Conservation House, 18 - 32 Manners St, Wellington.

**Chair:** Ian Angus

**Attendance:** Di Tracey, Kim Goetz (NIWA), Richard Wells (DWG), Tom Clark (FINZ), Martin Cryer, Nathan Walker, Greg Lydon, Sonja Hempel, Ben Sharp, Amanda Richards, Dominic Vallieres, Erin Breen, Rohan Currey (MPI), Janice Molloy (SSST), Jana Wold, Johannes Fischer (VUW), Paul Breen (NZ RLIC LTD), Johanna Pierre (JPEC LTD), Kath Walker, Graeme Elliot (Albatross Research), Karen Baird (F&B, BI), Trudi Webster (YEPT), Igor Debski, Freydis Hjorvarsdottir, Kris Ramm, Graeme Taylor (DOC).

**Apologies:** Richard Ford (MPI)

### **Introductions**

A general reminder of the purpose and scope of the February RAG meeting was presented and IA gave an update on the indicative timeline and process for the CSP Annual Plan 2016-17.

### **Update on medium term research plans**

ID highlighted minor changes in the updated CSP Seabird Plan 2016 following input of the latest risk assessment values.

KR presented minor updates to the CSP Protected Fish Plan 2016 following the publication of the Level – 1 chondrichthyans risk assessment.

### **Discussion on Prioritisation process**

ID presented an overview of the prioritisation scoring used to determine the initial prioritisation for consideration by the Group.

There was a discussion on the scoring scope for the projects and a breakdown of scores was provided to interested participants. Scoring of indirect-effects projects was discussed and it was suggested that an adaptation to the scoring method should be made for those projects, because they currently the weighting may favour direct-effects projects.

### **Discussion and scoring of projects**

Project proposals for 2016/17 and comments from the Group are summarised in the table below. Ongoing projects are included first in each project category (interaction, population and mitigation) for completeness.

### **Further feedback**

The Chair called for any additional feedback, in writing to [msp@doc.govt.nz](mailto:msp@doc.govt.nz), by 3 March 2016.

CSP RAG proposal		Comments from CSP RAG 25 Feb 2016
INT2015-02	Identification of marine mammals, turtles and protected fish captured in New Zealand fisheries	Ongoing project
INT2015-03	Identification and storage of cold-water coral bycatch specimens	Ongoing project – it was clarified that ongoing storage costs do not form part of this project.
INT-1	Observing commercial fisheries	This project will be developed by a separate process, in collaboration with MPI. Agreed high priority. One recommendation on the observer cameras trial project in FMA1, could be implemented in other FMA's. Black petrel group wants to stay involved in the development of the observer programme.
INT-2	Identification of seabirds in New Zealand fisheries	Agreed high priority (general support). Discussion about important information that might be lost from not bringing the birds back for necropsy. An analysis of the cost saving was suggested.
INT-3	Identification tools for seabirds, marine mammals, turtles and protected fish captured in New Zealand fisheries	Generally agreed high priority. Discussion on the scope of the project, with most benefit likely to come from increased engagement rather than facilitating better reporting.
INT-5	Indirect effects of commercial fishing on yellow-eyed penguins	Split views. - . The need for better information on the foraging distribution of yellow-eyed penguins was expressed as an information gap that should be filled first. It might be important to see the results of a threat management plan (recovery plan) to be able to focus on the right threats; this might not be one of them. Others suggested that it might be important to do a comparison research on the populations on offshore islands versus inland because offshore areas might not be under as much pressure. Concerns about projects on indirect effects not getting prioritised properly and they will never come out on top of the list, and it was suggested priority should be increased.
INT-4	Post release survival of white pointer sharks in New Zealand setnet fisheries	Split views. Some concern on the effectiveness of using observers to tag the sharks, and the sample sizes required. It was clarified that the project is a trial project, the method should be trialled first and then potentially expanded as a new project if the methods work. It was suggested the project should be re-scoped so it will give a better indication of the methods used, sample size, time and cost.
INT-6	Indirect effects of commercial fishing on Buller's shearwater and red-billed gulls	Split views. Some concerns that the budget is not sufficient to address these problems; they are complicated and the budget will only cover the initial. Might be a need to look at other offshore red-billed gull populations to see if there is a difference. It was also suggested that there might be something changing at the bottom of the food-chain, which could possibly not be related to fishing. The discussion about the prioritisation of indirect effects projects was raised again, and it was suggested priority should be increased.

CSP RAG proposal		Comments from CSP RAG 25 Feb 2016
POP2015-02	Flesh-footed shearwater: various locations population project	Ongoing project.
POP-9	Cetacean habitat suitability modelling project	Generally agreed high priority. Some discussion about concerns on lack of data; some species are data rich while others are not. Others strongly supported it and believed it was an important input for the risk assessment, although it had some limitations.
POP-11	Updated basking shark bycatch review	Agreed high priority.
POP-5	Seabird population research: Chatham Islands 2016-2017	Agreed high priority. Suggested that It might be possible to also collect genetic samples from Northern Buller's albatross, re-sight marked Chatham Island albatross and the importance of reviewing existing data on the Northern Buller's albatross to assess the feasibility of a mark-recapture study. It was also suggested that it might be important to expand the northern royal albatross research to 2 years to cover the entire breeding period.
POP-6	Seabird population research: Auckland Islands 2016-2017	Generally agreed high priority, though split views on the value of further mark-recapture elements to inform future more detailed modelling.
POP-2	Black petrel: Aotea/Great Barrier Island population project	Agreed high priority. It was suggested a review process refine the scope of the project and an update of the modelling be considered.
POP-3	Salvin's albatross: Bounty Islands population project	Agreed high priority, but careful consideration of methods is needed. It is an expensive project and it is very important that the right methodology is used. Might be useful to have a small design project to make sure that the methodology used is the most efficient one.
POP-14	Antipodean wandering albatross: Antipodes Island population project	Generally agreed high priority with some views that priority should be increased. Since the project didn't have a specific budget there was a discussion about how much funds it would require, what it would be spent on and the scope of the equipment needed. Using the helicopters there for mouse eradication would lower the cost of the project, but there were some concerns about not being able to collect further comparable data in other years. It was clarified that this would be a one-off opportunity for an island-wide census and population trend data could be collected in future from monitoring study areas.
POP-7	Yellow-eyed penguin foraging distribution	General agreement on priority. It was suggested that this project should take place before the indirect effects of fishing on the yellow-eyed penguins was undertaken. The need to ensure data was made available was highlighted.
POP-8.1	New Zealand Sea Lion: Auckland Islands population project – status quo	Agreed high priority. It was also noted that further research on Campbell Island should be progressed.
POP-4	Southern Buller's albatross: Snares/Tini Heke population project	General agreement on priority. It was suggested that an updated population estimate would also be due during the three year proposed term.

CSP RAG proposal		Comments from CSP RAG 25 Feb 2016
POP-8.2	New Zealand Sea Lion: Auckland Islands population project – pup count only	This option was considered low priority, as it was considered inadequate to answer the questions that we need answered.
POP-12	The age and growth of New Zealand protected corals at high risk	It was highlighted that age and growth studies in New Zealand are lacking, though studies exist overseas.
POP-13	Cold-water coral connectivity in New Zealand	It was noted that this project has similarities to a project that MPI has, and it would be important to review that information first before another project is started. It was clarified that the scope of this project covered different species to the MPI project.
POP-1	Grey petrel: Antipodes Island population project	Agreed this was a relatively low priority, but could be done cost effectively alongside the other Antipodes Island project if that is undertaken.
POP-10	NZ fur seal: Bounty Islands population assessment	Agreed to be a relatively low priority, but could be cost effectively progressed alongside the Salvin's albatross project.
MIT2015-01	Seabird bycatch reduction (small vessel longline fisheries)	Ongoing project
MIT2015-02	Small vessel surface longline: seabird mitigation	Ongoing project. An update was provided and it was noted that progress was on hold until relevant previous projects had completed.
MIT-2	Inshore small vessel trawl: seabird mitigation	Agreed high priority, but it was noted that observer coverage had not been achieved and industry funded work was underway, so the project should be postponed..
MIT-1	Protected species bycatch newsletter	Split views. There was discussion on the current penetration of the newsletter and potential distribution methods.
MIT-3	Entanglement of whales in pot/trap lines and set-nets and a review of potential mitigation methods	Split views. There was discussion about the objectives of the proposal and how risk was defined. Actions that NZRLIC have completed on whale entanglement mitigation over the past 3 years were highlighted, including data collection through OceanSnap. It was suggested the characterisation component, drawing on all available sources of entanglement data, would be of higher priority.
MIT-4	Review of mitigation techniques in pelagic trawl fisheries: marine mammal mitigation.	Agreed to be a relatively low priority. It was noted that interaction rates have dropped since 2003.