



Meeting: Conservation Services Programme Technical Working Group
Date: 2 July 2026
Time: 10:00 am – 15:00 pm
Place: Microsoft Teams Meeting
Chair: Katie Clemens-Seely (Programme Manager, Conservation Services Programme)

Attendees: Katie Clemens-Seely, Johannes Fischer, Erin Hewetson, Hollie McGovern, Libby Rowley, Arawhetu Waipoua, Graeme Taylor, Igor Debski, Kath Walker, Kat Manno, Jody Weir, Steve Pilkington, Claudia Mischler (DOC), Ben Steele-Mortimer, Dave Goad (SNZ) Chris Gaskin (The Seabird Trust), Kalinka Rexer-Huber, Graham Parker (Parker Conservation), Jonathan Rutter (University of Oxford), Peter Frost (Science Support Service), William Gibson, Alexander Arkhipkin, Heather Benko (MPI) Alasdair Hall (Hall Marine Consulting), Paul Sagar (Independent), Barry Weeber (ECO)

Presentations:

9:05 am	Southern Buller's tracking analyses	Jonathan Rutter
9:50 am	POP2025-09 Campbell Island seabird research	DOC
10:45 am	POP2023-05 Southern Buller's population study	Parker Conservation
11:30 am	POP2025-05 Salvin's albatross Western Chain research	Parker Conservation
12:45 pm	POP2025-04 Auckland Islands seabird research: white-capped albatross	Parker Conservation
13:30 pm	POP2025-09 Antipodean albatross and white-chinned petrel research	Parker Conservation
14:15 pm	POP2025-06 Updated population assessment for New Zealand fur seal	Dr Alasdair Hall

1. Southern Buller's tracking analyses

Jonathan Rutter presented on navigating uncertainty in fine-scale fisheries overlap to assess bycatch risk of a wide-ranging pelagic seabird.

Discussion:

BSM We need to be careful about inferring overlap as bycatch risk. Catchability differs significantly between different gear types, and is important distinction to make when trying to compare the potential risks between different gear types. And does tag degradation bias data collected for birds foraging near New Zealand vs those migrating offshore?

JR We tried to emphasise that interpreting attendance as a proxy for bycatch risk is useful, but should be done completely differently between trawlers and pelagic longline. Secondly, tags may decline slightly towards end-of-life but the model does account for this.

BSM We need to be weary of using SEFRA outputs for estimated mortalities, due to uncertainty in the cryptic multiplier. It might be better to use estimated captures from the risk assessment instead, because there is more certainty.

JR Cryptic mortality is a huge factor here. That's not to say attendance rates are the true proxy vs SEFRA rates being completely correct, we are just trying to understand what's going on and get the best proxy for risk that we can.

JF Agree that more work is needed to better estimate cryptic mortality and improve observations of warp strikes. This work showed a lot of birds, in particular from the declining Snares population, are hanging out behind NZ trawlers, whether or not that means that there is more bycatch in the NZ trawlers of the Snares birds is yet to be seen, but this work highlights our need for a better understanding as that is the most at risk species. Hopefully can move towards a solution for getting better observations of birds and gear interactions behind trawlers than what we currently have.

BSM Just want to make sure that in the report those things are caveated.

WG Geopositional vessel data was not requested as part of this project. Lack of AIS doesn't equate to lack of fine scale positional data. In terms of international work, WCPFC also has purse seine, and noting in the South Pacific slide, I suspect there was some overlap with high seas Chinese fleet.

JR We recognise that AIS is not comprehensive and have tried to account for that. We worked with what we had, I believe we were not able to get access to those data. Purse seiners were excluded from the analysis as there was basically no attendance at all and the fleet is known to have very little bycatch.

JF Good to know further existing data that could improve these analyses and look to see if we can integrate it, but there are obviously challenges with data sharing that are still ongoing.

DG We need to be consistent through the text and call it vessel minutes. You need to be really clear about the assumptions being made. The recent AEWG presentation on expert identifications of seabirds from camera footage indicates longline captures are at

least an order of magnitude lower than the SEFRA estimates, which explains some of the disparity you are seeing in your work. For SLL, the problem is the soak period, so tracking the gear location rather than boat location would be more important for the domestic fleet. Fine-scale vessel data will be helpful for validating your methods and assumptions.

JF Of course the current SEFRA estimates are higher than current figures as mitigation in SLL has improved so much.

DG My point was that with cameras we don't need SEFRA for inshore capture estimates - you can quote the numbers from camera footage review.

JF That's fair, but we can't use EM for the Deepwater trawlers of course, so some further estimation needs to be done there, ideally with improved ways of estimating the cryptic mortality there

2. POP2025-09 Campbell Island seabird research

Claudia Mischler presented on the draft report for the 2025/26 season of seabird research on Campbell Island.

Discussion:

PF It's nice to see an extended stay on Campbell Island. Do you get a sense that the regrowth and gradual increase in altitude of *Dracophyllum* is crowding out nesting sites?

CM It is definitely a factor, and we noticed how much it's spreading upwards. We saw it a lot in the Col study site; we saw quite a lot of nests further down in the *Dracophyllum* that just don't get used at all anymore. Moubay is particularly affected by *Dracophyllum*. We saw a few dead chicks that we suspect got disorientated in a forest of *Dracophyllum*.

GP Colin Meurk collected some good photo point information that shows the spread of *Dracophyllum*. Regarding giant petrels, some are biennial breeders, but some do breed annually. Great to see such a big programme on Campbell.

PF What was the result of the HPAI samples taken?

JF We have been undertaking HPAI sampling for three years now, and so far it's produced negative results across all islands and taxa. We didn't include the results here as this work is undertaken across multiple agencies, so those results will be reported elsewhere.

3. POP2023-05 Southern Buller's population study

Kalinka Rexer-Huber presented the draft report for the 2025/26 Southern Buller's population study.

Discussion:

JF Thanks for all the work, great to see almost complete full island census for this population, it was desperately needed.

GT Do you have any context on the South-West Prom area, i.e. has it been surveyed before, are there any birds known to be out there?

KRH It has been counted previously, there has been some changes in the access to it. It's steep and very exposed. There have been a combination of ground counts and vantage point counts in the past, and the vantage point count. We didn't attempt to count Alert Stack from the boat because it's not a comparable count relative to one conducted from the same elevation on the cliffs.

KW Impressive work, well done to everyone involved.

KRH Paul's depth of experience of the island has been invaluable to pull off the whole island count. It's not an easy place to work.

4. POP2025-05 Salvin's albatross Western Chain research

Kalinka Rexer-Huber presented the draft report on the 2025/26 Salvin's albatross Western Chain research.

Discussion:

KW The helicopter seems like a good option; if timing was not an issue, would you consider going a month earlier to align with earlier trips? And what was the reason for being picked up earlier in the day for this trip.

KRH We were picked up early to ensure arrival back on the mainland before twilight hours began affecting helicopter operations. It's possible we might be able to push out to nautical twilight in the future. Ideally, we would be able to do the work at the same time as previously. That was initially the plan, but we were delayed due to weather.

GP In our March trip to the Snares we tried to land at the Western Chain twice, but the swell meant it wasn't possible. We didn't see any evidence of damage from the October storm on the Snares or Western Chain. Four people is the max for a twin-engine helicopter.

KW Good to see that even though you weren't able to land in March, the helicopter was able to provide good learnings around landings etc.

KRH There were a lot of learning around logistics. Given the extent of damage in Southland from those storms, we assumed that the low nest counts on Toru might have been a side effect from some of those big wind impacts, but there wasn't really evidence of any particular effect that could be attributed to that storm.

GT Is there any way you can get a better prediction of whether you would be able to drone when timing the trips e.g. automatic weather station at the Snares?

KRH There are different weather parameters to consider for helicopter use vs drone use. Windy forecast is helpful to target lower wind speeds, but this would impact the standby period for the team. The extent of obscured nests left us with significant reservations about how useful counts and drone footage might actually be. Ideally, we don't need to rely on aerial photographic counts, if we do then a lot of effort needs to go into good ground truthing data.

JF With the work you've done from the ground counts, including recording proportion that's visible and not visible, we can use some good adjustment factors for Rima, but it may not be totally transferrable.

DG Did you consider taking aerial photos from the helicopter?

KRH In this case we had planned for ground counts and droning, so didn't have the equipment to pivot to helicopter photos. Programmed drone flights are good for repeatability, as you can save the drone flight parameters and repeat it precisely. However, the helicopter could be used in future if weather doesn't not permit flying a drone.

5. POP2025-04 Auckland Islands seabird research: white-capped albatross

Graham Parker presented draft report for the 2025/26 season of Auckland Islands seabird research: white-capped albatross.

Discussion:

BW Will this work be presented to Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA) and Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to bring awareness for how far these birds move?

JF We would need to think about how we would package that particularly for SIOFA, as NZ is not a member. The best avenue would be for ACAP to look into a wider update of relevant seabird species that occur in the SIOFA convention area.

BW I can help as I readily attend SIOFA meetings. It's worth communicating with Australia who are a SIOFA party. The trawl vessels are flagged to Cook Islands, and there are EU flagged toothfish vessels in that area.

PF Did you get an estimate for the cost of satellite data to create high resolution DEM? Seems important to have for the long term.

JF Think an island the size of Campbell Island would be between \$10-15,000. The bigger challenge though would be finding a window without cloud cover, which we have been struggling with on Campbell for a number of years. Note the importance of being able to produce these DEMs though.

GP Disappointment Island has far less cloud coverage than main Auckland Island as it sits so low.

GT In future if you are unable to land, is it possible to at least drone of the study area portion from the boat?

GP You probably could drone from the vessel. There is also an element of skipper experience. Still going to have the issue of not having any ground truthing to go with it, but you'd at least get an idea of what is happening in that study area where we have counted them several times in the past.

6. POP2025-09 Antipodean albatross and white-chinned petrel research

Kalinka Rexer-Huber presented the draft report for the 2025/26 season of Antipodean albatross and white-chinned petrel research.

Discussion:

GT Black-browed albatross should be hatching from early to mid-December. It's surprising to see the number of adults present for that number of chicks.

KRH The chicks visible in photos were large chicks. One of the big challenges of not being able to determine what proportion of the other black-browed albatrosses might have actually been brooding a large chick. The proportion of loafers around is also a consideration too.

KW Well done, thanks for persisting with all burrowscoping, it's not easy.

KRH White-chinned petrels are quite a major effort, as they will always be secondary to the priority of Antipodean albatross.

PF Congratulations on an incredible amount of hard work. I can't help but notice that the change in population data for Antipodean albatross and survival rates coincides with years in the mid-2000s where no research happened. Could be due to changed methods?

KRH Methods did not change as Kath and Graham were undertaking the work throughout that period.

KW 2005 was the only year that was missed, as there wasn't enough funding in 2005 to get to the island. We were able to get to Adams Island though where the same thing happened at the same time with Gibson's. It's still a puzzle to see how something so significant happened.

KRH We saw that across other albatross species too across the early 2000's.

PF That suggests something really significant happened during that period. We need to get more environmental information in order to build a bigger picture.

KW We were looking at things like sea surface temperatures and global temperatures too.

JF [Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels - PaCSWG9 Doc 03 Rev 2: A standardised fra...](#) for the description of the methodology underlying these trend models. Yvan did a significant amount of work trying to link drivers to these population dynamics in the Antipodean albatross study system, returning virtually no climate factors as driving forces of the population dynamics, but more likely the shifting dynamics within the global pelagic long line fleet, particularly within the Tasman. Other species have not been subject to analysis so would be interesting to see if they return the same results.

DG That's a dilemma as if anything, the NZ fleet would have been doing better than they had previously in that period.

DG Regarding the reduced breeding success of white-chinned petrels you put tags on, presumably you would expect this more for a burrow nester than a surface nester?

KRH Monitoring of surface nesters can be easier than burrow nesters, however there are methods to reduce disturbance of burrow nesters e.g. burrow gates. This was more of a one off, and if more intensive burrow checks are required for other work similar to this, then we will need to consider how to address it.

7. POP2025-06 Updated population assessment for New Zealand fur seal

Al Hall presented an updated population assessment for New Zealand fur seal.

Discussion:

AA Can you expand on the factors affecting the abundance of populations, as I don't think you mentioned the predation. We know sea lions, orcas and sharks predate fur seals.

AH We don't have much data on what is eating fur seal in large numbers. NZSL overlap in some areas, but the numbers are so low that I would be surprised if NZSL predation is driving trend populations for fur seals. NZ orca do not predate fur seals as they specialise on rays and sharks. Sharks do predate fur seals; better matching of fur seal movement data with shark distribution could improve understanding.

DM Is this the first population estimate that doesn't have any reliance on the counts Wilson did in 1970's? Essentially you are saying you have new information for every colony in your model?

AH Wilson (1975) abundance estimates were not used. We do not have new information for every colony as there haven't been on the ground assessments done at most of the colonies for some time. Modelling was applied where we were able to get reliable data.

DM Do you think the Wilson estimates have been used to some extent in every estimate in literature since then?

AH Many past estimates are from 20 years ago and extrapolated colony data into Wilson's framework.

DM How many of the 99 sites in the catalogue were excluded as guesstimates?

AH Colonies that were too small to be modelled or with insufficient data were listed as guesstimates.

DM Could you elaborate on the assumptions made around how big the colonies can grow to and when that has an impact, in regard to the 2025 paper referenced.

AH In the 2025 paper, density dependence was excluded due to lack of NZ data. The n-max values were based on the largest recorded colony estimates available. It's not ideal having to put a coarse ceiling on some of these colony estimates, however given the limitations of the data we have available, this was the best approach at the time.

DM Could you give more detail what the n-max numbers were for each colony? New estimate is very helpful and much needed, but there is some uncertainty captured in the range given it is generated from two processes (counts and modelling exercise). When you finalise the report, please include some discussion around the uncertainty of that range.

AH Trying to work in the bounds of the data that we have which does put limitations on what we can and can't include. We do mention in the paper that it's likely to produce an underestimate, so happy to include that if that would be useful. We did run some sensitivity tests on the model when we first wrote the paper. For one of the colonies, the model accurately produced the actual change in pup production over 20 years projection, for the other one it did underestimate it. This is where a more coordinated framework would help to standardise when abundance estimates are collected, as well as methodologies. I can include more discussion in the final report.

BSM Is it possible some colonies in the North Island have been missed from the nationwide abundance estimate. Were there any recommendations that some North Island distributions or changes in colonies that may not be the main monitored colonies?

AH We are hoping there would be more consistent effort put in at some of those North Island colonies. Plans to do Cape Palliser in January 2027, but ideally we'd be able to make some of the other colonies part of the regular large scale assessment that would give us an understanding of where fur seals are breeding in the North Island and what the trends are.

BSM In terms of migration, there seems to be high genetic connectivity between colonies, would there be any potential explanation around the declining West Coast South Island population migrating towards the east or further north?

AH We don't have any information to suggest that at the moment. This is where range wide surveys would help to pick up on these kinds of patterns.

GL Is this the end of the project?

AH This is the final report for POP2025-06, but doesn't include the Cape Palliser work. I will provide a separate report for that work.

GL Is the definition of a fur seal colony the same as for sealions?

AH No. We used the definition taken from studies in Australia, which is a breeding aggregation of fur seals, so that could be just a single pup being produced.

GL Given there are interactions with fisheries all around the North Island, are there colonies further north that we haven't found yet or could there be an inter-migration with the population of Australia?

AH Satellite tracking is something we are trying to develop. Fur seals don't typically do large scale migration. Outside the breeding season the males do leave the colony and do tend to travel further. We have sat tags from a while ago of animals going from Cape Foulwind up to Taranaki Bight.

JF Have heard anecdotally of big colonies in the Chatham Islands, is it worth having a recommendation to establish what those population numbers are?

AH Yes agreed, would be interesting to see those counts.

PF There is apparently increasing numbers further north in Hauraki Gulf. The bulls have been disrupting the gannets. In terms of longer-term strategy, is it worthwhile passing this information onto other groups that have an interest and cover some of the islands, to start to document the increase in numbers and prevalence, if any, of breeding of fur seals further north. I could provide 2017 count for bulls on Ohia Island.

AH Please do pass that information on, that would be hugely helpful.

BW We do see fur seals occasionally on the Coromandel coast. Past Dunedin work has suggested that population increases could not be explained solely by local colonies, implying migration possibly from the Bounties. DOC genetic work from 20 years ago and VIC Uni research indicates genetic differences between colonies. Retaining genetic diversity is important for biodiversity and fisheries considerations. Clearly there are some issues that require more funding and work.

JW Future funding would be amazing.

BW Any table of estimates should consider potential overestimates as well as underestimates.

AH As the West Coast shows, the interannual variability can be huge, so what might look like an increase one year can very quickly drop off the next. We are trying to understand that over vs underestimate with the data we've got. Take those points around trying to provide more info on those elements of the model.

Any additional comments should be provided to by 5pm, 16th July 2026. Close of Meeting @ 15:10 pm