SEAFOOD NEW ZEALAND

From hardened fishermen to 'petrel heads'

Dolphin plan: what about fishers' wellbeing?

August 2019 | Volume 27 | No. 04

From hardened fishermen

to 'petrel heads'

A rare collaboration between fishermen and conservationists is improving the lot of a vulnerable New Zealand seabird, the black petrel. It's also changing attitudes and forging new links, reports LESLEY HAMILTON.

Adam Clow (left) and his petrel crew Mitchell Thomas, Mathew Anderson and Nigel Hollands (right).

Five young men struggle their way through bush to the top of a 600-metre mountain on a remote island in the Hauraki Gulf.

Some are heavily tattooed, most are out of breath and almost all are wondering why the hell they are there. It is a far cry from the urban environment most call home. It bears little resemblance to anything they are familiar with and is not what they signed up for when agreeing to crew a fishing vessel out of Tauranga.

However, this collaboration between young fishermen and conservationists is changing lives.

Adam Clow is a young dad. He skippers the longliner *Southern Cross* out of Tauranga and, with his dad Phil, has just converted the *Tarpeena*, a former Danish seiner to a bottom longliner.

Clow has just returned from Great Barrier Island, a breeding ground for the nationally vulnerable seabird, black petrel (taiko). It is here that he regularly brings his young crew to learn about the bird that is susceptible to dying on the longline hooks that are the fishermen's livelihoods.

The black petrel breeds only on Great and Little Barrier Islands in the Hauraki Gulf. Great Barrier Island's Mount Hobson stands 622 metres tall and is home to the largest colony.

"Crew come and go but when you think you have some stayers I make sure to take them up the mountain," Clow said.

Southern Seabirds Solutions is a charitable trust with a focus on protecting seabirds in New Zealand and Clow credits trust convenor Janice Molloy with the initiative.

"We wanted to find a way to make fishermen more aware of seabirds and to do a better job of protecting them," Molloy said. "We wanted to give them a hands-on way to learn about the birds – get them off the water and get them to the mountain to handle the birds and meet the ecologists."

The visits to the colony have been going for five years.

Clow said he was still seeing the value of that very first trip all that time ago. "My boys, the ones who did that first trip, are still talking about it and teaching the younger crews what they learned. They are really proud they've done it."

The trek to the colony at the top of the mountain is an eye-opener for the crew.

The industry has its fair share of hard men and women. Clow runs a hard-working boat and the crew respect that. He is clearly close to his staff and pays them well. In an industry that struggles to recruit, Clow is doing a pretty good job of keeping them, although taking them

> **"They're puffed for a start. Too many cigarettes. They are happy and excited to be off the boat but really have no idea why they are going to climb a mountain to look at seabirds in burrows."**
> **– ADAM CLOW**

for a hike up a mountain to cuddle birds could easily have been a leap of faith in their stickability.

"We steamed out from Whitianga. Took an ex-fishing boat. Took us about seven hours to get there. Had to stop in the middle of the channel to do a filter change because all the fuel filters were blocked but, we got there. We caught a feed of snapper while the maintenance was being done," Clow said.

Once on Great Barrier the trek to the breeding ground is a two-hour uphill hike.

Clow laughs: "They're puffed for a start. Too many cigarettes. They are happy and excited to be off the boat but really have no idea why they are going to climb a mountain to look at seabirds in burrows.

"We punch our way through the scrub and when we get up there the scientists give us a spiel about the life cycle of the bird and then we start helping with tagging the chicks. The technique is that you put your hand in the burrow and the chick bites your finger with a very sharp little beak and then you can gently pull it out by its beak.

"You then hold it like a baby, very carefully, while the ecologists tag it. They are about 500 grams to a kilo and are very fluffy and warm. They record all its information and then we pop them back into the burrow."

The young fishermen then share dinner with the wildlife management team in the hut.

"And we share stories as well. As interesting as it is for us to hear from them about the black petrel life cycle and what they are doing when they are not on the water, the ecologists are just as interested to talk to the fishermen.

"We can tell them what they are doing when they are on the water – how they are feeding and other behaviours. You can't buy that information anywhere else."

The exchange of information is a win for both sides.

"My guys would never usually rub shoulders with these people. It's two different walks of life coming together.

"You can actually see the mindset change. They're holding the birds, helping the scientists tag them, learning that people come from all over the world to photograph these birds. That there are people who spend their whole lives studying the birds that we get to see every day out on the water."

Clow is in awe of the birds' journey.

"These birds start their life on Great Barrier, and when they leave, for the very first time, they fly 12,000 kilometres due east, turn left at the Galapagos and

Photo, Dave Boyle.

Video will spread message

Education about the rarity of black petrels needs to be shared not only amongst New Zealand fishermen but also those fleets that overlap with them when they are on their migration to South America.

The Southern Seabird Solutions Trust has received funding from the Auckland Zoo Charitable Trust to produce educational material for fishermen in Ecuador and Peru and is producing a video that liaison officers in those countries can show fishermen.

The video will feature Adam Clow and his crew visiting the black petrel colony on Great Barrier Island and will also show the efforts Clow and others take to reduce the risk to black petrels while bottom longlining.

Seabird expert and crew member Leef Smith.

congregate in the waters off Ecuador where they spend the summer. From the time the bird leaves Great Barrier it won't touch land again until about five years later when it returns to the colony to mate."

The black petrel is a monogamous bird and both parents incubate the egg for 57 days and then jointly care for the chick.

"Something that I hammer home to the boys is that, if we accidentally kill a black petrel during the breeding season we will also be killing the one in the burrow waiting for food. That pretty much makes them take extra, extra care."

Clow knows that the seabirds are still in decline but that while they're in New Zealand, the best is being done for them.

"Self-reporting by fishermen when they catch a seabird is 100 percent better than it was 10 years ago. The more information we have to feed into the science the easier it is to calculate numbers."

Seabird Smart workshops have run alongside colony visits. These teach skippers and crew how to minimise seabird interactions and how to mitigate against capture.

"Different regions have different species they try to educate their crews on in these workshops. I know there is good work also going on with the hoiho, (yellow-eyed penguin) down south."

Down from the mountain and back on board Clow sees a total change in attitude towards seabirds.

"They all know about the mitigation methods we employ on board to avoid seabird bycatch but changing the attitude towards the creatures is the key. They want to do better. They have a new bond with

Industry working on seabird catch mitigation

The seafood Industry invests substantial amounts of time, resources and energy working with open- minded collaborators, who like the industry, believe that to effect real change a collaborative proactive pragmatic approach is preferable to a big stick. ***Three examples:***

1 Underwater bait setter

Fisheries Inshore New Zealand (FINZ) and Southern Seabirds Solutions Trust (SSST) have been promoting this with the Government. A trial is underway to test the technology, which carries baited hooks underwater in a steel capsule connected to hydraulic winches. This deploys the baited hooks to depths beyond the reach of albatrosses and petrels. This trial is a collaborative effort, and is being funded by the Department of Conservation, Fisheries New Zealand, FINZ and the Auckland Zoo Charitable Trust.

2 Adaptive management tools

FINZ is looking at the potential capabilities of integrating Electronic Reporting (ER) with wider gear sensors. A DOC funded project currently underway is developing electronic tags that attach to lines to enable fishers to monitor the depth and distance of their hooks in real time and make decisions to mitigate risks to seabirds. This is a collaborative project involving Trident Systems and ZebraTech.

3 Hookpods

Hookpods enclose the baited hooks in a case, releasing them 10-15 metres below the surface, considered below the high-risk area for diving birds. Prior to the inclusion of hookpods as a mitigation measure by regional fishery management organisations, FINZ was already working closely with Hookpod Ltd to test hookpods in New Zealand's fisheries. Commercial operators have been testing 600 hookpods since May 2019, with another 1200 to be deployed soon.

The amazing diversity of seabirds makes New Zealand one of the most challenging places in the world to fish without risking catching seabirds. FINZ is actively facilitating and implementing these projects to meet this challenge.

the bird because they have handled it and that's the brilliance of this gig."

Clow singles out his crewmate Leef Smith.

"He is our seabird guy. He knows even more than some of our observers. Leef will name every bird, every type of albatross – he's right into it."

The programme on Great Barrier is run by Wildlife Management International under a dedicated team led by Elizabeth (Biz) Bell who has spent nearly 25 years studying black petrels in their burrows.

"Biz almost knows these petrels by name. She has put her whole life's work into this. They are conservationists. They are greenies. They are seabird experts who are leading the world in seabird translocations, but they are getting alongside us fishermen.

"They are working with us and training us. They're not pointing the finger. They are actually getting in beside us and teaching us. Biz is an incredible person and so passionate about this."

Clow said he was proud to live in a country where fishermen and conservationists can get around a table, talk and get the right outcome.

"This is the best approach. Working together with NGOs and government and hammering it out is the best way to get results. We all work in with our regional DOC seabird liaison officers who support us to set up our boats to reduce seabird bycatch. One of them even joined us on our trip up the mountain."

Clow, like many other fishers, faces his share of ignorance around the commercial fishing industry.

"Only a small number of people know what we do, and the others have to wade through the bullshit. Your child's bus driver, or the guy that changes your tyre will tell you what they think you are doing wrong out there. As you get older you get a harder skin. It used to really affect me, but you have to hold your head up and know you are doing your best."

Clow has seen a massive turnaround on conservation issues in the nine years he has been fishing.

"I am seeing hard guys, guys you would never have expected to care, filling out the protected species book and telling other guys to make sure they do it. These are people you would never have thought would come around, but they have."

Clow is a big fan of cameras on vessels and has had

cameras on the *Southern Cross* for six years but admits there is still some work to do to get them on every vessel.

"On the two boats that I operate we have volunteered to have cameras watching us every second of the day. If you are not doing anything wrong, and it is practical to actually put a camera on a boat, then I reckon most guys would want it."

Walking up the wharf from the *Southern Cross*, Clow takes time out to stop and wish a departing crew member good luck. Why is he leaving?

"He's tired. This life is hard. You can't do it forever. But these guys are walking out of a week working for me with good money in their pockets.

"They earn every cent. But that's not everything."

Meanwhile, Clow is putting family first with a long holiday. Along with his wife Rachel and their three young children they are off to the Pacific Islands in a purpose-built catamaran. Clow will sail the family from the Coromandel to Tonga and Fiji.

He too can see a time when he could leave fishing behind.

"Yeah, I will exit eventually. I want to do more conservation work. I just hope that what we have taught these young guys will filter down to the next lot. I think it will. We have to do the right thing."

Adam Clow (left), with fellow "petrel heads" Mathew Anderson, Luke Fisher, Simon Blithe and Seabird Liaison Officer Nigel Hollands (right).