

# Fishing Work Ups for Snapper

That urge to follow gannets to work-ups can be like a disease that can't be cured.

Once you have experienced being in the midst of one, it may well change your life. It can be so exciting that the prospect of fishing other ones will keep you awake at night. It's like being a kid again on Christmas Eve, and if you strike it right, it can be like all your Christmases coming at once.

I, for one, can't get enough of fishing around work-ups. I never get bored with them and could just watch them all day long. Every work-up is different, with each having its own shape, intensity, and attendant fish species, sea birds and mammals. If you like fishing and have never experienced fishing in a work-up, I highly recommend you do so – especially if armed with a light outfit that has a lure dangling from the end.

Although work-ups can be found throughout the year, spring and early summer (leading up to Christmas) is the very best time around Auckland. The second-best time is during autumn, when the water is cooling. They can be within 15 kilometres of Auckland during these times.



The sight of whales feeding on plankton heralds the beginning of the spring work-up cycle. Often the whales are feeding by themselves, and you may wonder how they can sustain themselves by such tiny organisms. After all, they're not even big enough to attract the type of fish we want to catch. However, the pilchards DO feed on plankton, so when you see the whales feeding in this manner, it's fair to assume the pilchards can't be far away. Then, once this happens, it's boom time, with the work-up action cranking right up and the gulf suddenly coming alive. Thousands of dolphins, whales, thresher sharks and seabirds home in on the tonnes of pilchards that

have invaded the Hauraki Gulf. And then, of course, we have the snapper; it's a truly amazing fishery we have here in Auckland – some say it's the best snapper fishery in the world. I believe them.

During spring and autumn, if the weather plays ball, we can just about guarantee we'll find work-up action and a bin-full of fish when taking clients out on one of the Wavedancer boats.



## How to find them

The best way to find work-ups is by covering likely areas, so having a fast boat helps a lot. That's why we are now seeing more and more jet-skis fishing out there. These small craft are often way out in the gulf, and it sure looks like a lot of fun.

A pair of binoculars will really help you find the telltale signs indicating where the work-ups might be. I like to get out to about 40m of water and then switch to search mode, looking for any signs that may lead me to the action, such as seabirds, whale spouts, dolphins, splashes, bait schools (often only visible on the fish-finder) or anything out of the ordinary. A group of boats out in the middle of nowhere can also be a dead giveaway.

More likely though, you might see a couple of gannets fly past, and then a few more. If this happens, I'll note the direction they're heading, get my binos out, and see if there's any sign up ahead.

You can't do this type of intense searching through the binos with the boat moving; you need to be stopped. (I brace myself against something on the boat or sit down, so I really have maximum control on the binoculars.) Now train your eyes and mind so they concentrate way ahead towards the far horizon; the trick is to look deep into the lens, focusing as far away from the boat as you can. And be sure to scan the horizon slowly to increase your chances of seeing something. This is a skill that must be learnt, and you will get better and better at it with practice. (My friend Andy off the Whale Watch boat is an expert at this, and can often see work-ups many miles away when others can't.)

What you're looking for is any type of movement on the sea surface or up in the air. At sea surface level you want to look for any white specks, as these tend to be gannets. These white specks might be grouped up and not moving, indicating a raft of gannets, or they may appear then disappear, getting lost behind the swells. If you see anything, stop swinging the binos and stare at the same spot for 30 seconds.



It is really easy to lose the direction once you stop looking through the binos, so note a distant object to line up the activity you've seen. This may be a landmark in the distance, or a cloud or a boat – anything to give you a reference for the direction to travel in. Having some land in the background provides greater contrast, making it easier to spot gannets in the air.

Another telltale sign is a whale spout. These can be seen from miles away, and if I see one of these I always head in that direction to check it out; whales are never far away from the bait schools and work-ups (as long as they're not just feeding on plankton).

The presence of dolphins is a very positive sign, too. These sea creatures often hang out in large packs and send off scouting groups to find the bait. So if you see a large group of dolphins, have a look around and you will often see the scout packs hunting in front and to the sides of the main pod.

Ideally though, you want to see them travelling in a mass of fast moving splashes, as this tends to be excited dolphins in chase mode. When dolphins act like this, it's because they've found a school of bait fish with their sonar (most of the whales we see in the Hauraki Gulf use their hearing and eyesight to

do this instead). I only use the dolphins to help me find the work-ups when they're in a hunting type of mood; if they're being playful and curious and just hanging about, I don't really take much notice of them. It's very obvious when they're in the mood: they will be swimming fast with plenty of purpose in a similar direction.

I also often see them swimming in a large circle – so large, in fact, you may need to observe them for quite some time to figure out if this is actually the case. If doing this, there are often baitfish in the area, so I hang around to see if anything eventuates. Whatever happens though, I try not to disturb the dolphins, as this may put them off searching for baitfish, which is counterproductive for finding work-ups.

Once you've found the work-ups, it's time to assess what's going on. Some days they'll be staying still and not moving much. This means the dolphins have rounded the baitfish up nicely and are holding them in a tight, swirling ball. You will see the dolphins leisurely cruising around the outside of the bait 'meatball', zooming in every now and then to nail a baitfish or three. This is the best situation, as you can park next to the work-up and drop your lines down.

Sometimes the work-ups can be fast moving, which means the dolphins are chasing down the baitfish and trying to round them up. This can be frustrating, as by the time you get your lines down the fish are gone. I find the best technique in this situation is to stop well ahead of where you think they're heading and let them come to you.





Keep a close eye on what's happening, because the dolphins can have the baitfish rounded up at any moment. If they do get things sorted, give them a few minutes to get settled, and then move closer to the bait ball for a lure fish.

When the birds are widespread and scattered, this often means there are no dolphins present and its either kingfish, kahawai or even snapper driving the baitfish up to the surface. In this situation, I will have a look around first before settling on an area with the most bird action and sounder sign.



Another scenario involves those intense, short-lived work-ups that last for a minute or two then die. You can find yourself driving all over the ocean trying to be there when the work-up is on. Sometimes, when it's like this there will be a tandem work-up situation: a work-up will start intensely and go for a few minutes, then all the birds will leave, go to a second area holding baitfish, have a brief work-up, and then come back to the first area. If you can see this happening, stay where the brief work-up was and, hopefully, the birds (and bait) will return shortly.

When the work-ups are short-lived and brief, you may need to move around to catch fish. You're hunting fish down, not waiting for something to happen, so fish the work-up until you stop catching fish, then move to the next one. You may only pick up a few fish from each work-up, so you need to move to maximise your chances of catching. If you visualise the snapper below the work-ups travelling from one area of activity to another, and copy this behaviour, you should always be close to the snapper.

You also need to have patience when searching for work-ups; you must be prepared to cover ground and spend time and petrol looking for them. Using the birds and mammals is the key to finding work-ups – pick up on what they're doing and they will soon lead you to the action. They're good at it, too – they have to be to survive.

More info on New Zealand seabirds and what they contribute to our fishing at [the Southern Seabirds website](#)

***Seabirds are an important part of our fishing environment. As anglers, it's our job to look after them while out fishing. Check out these resources by Southern Seabird Solutions and enjoy the birds.***

# FISH SEABIRD SMART

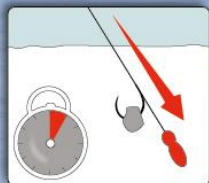
TIPS FROM SALTWATER ANGLERS



Seabirds and fishing go together – but sometimes seabirds get tangled in fishing lines and nets or caught on hooks. If a breeding adult is injured or killed, its chick will die of starvation. Small changes in the way we all fish can make a big difference to seabird survival.

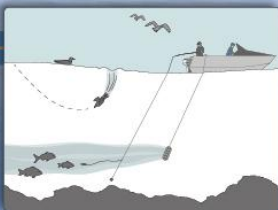
## 1 FISH TIDY

- Seabirds are hunting for food – keep decks clean and put bait scraps and fish waste in covered bins until hooks are out of the water.



## 2 FISH FAST

- Seabirds mostly fish within six metres of the surface – sink bait well below six metres fast, particularly when there are lots of seabirds around, like work-ups.
- Seabirds move fast – set and reel in your gear quickly and always watch for birds.



## 3 BURLEY WELL BELOW THE BIRDS

- Sink burley containers deep – further from the birds, closer to the fish!



## 4 DETER OR DISTRACT BIRDS FROM YOUR GEAR

- Create a 'safe zone' to get gear up and down away from birds. Some anglers tie streamers to an outrigger or spare rod to distract birds, others throw a bucket of water towards birds.

# SEABIRD SAFE RELEASE

REDUCES INJURY TO THE BIRD AND THE FISHER



## ESSENTIAL TOOLS



## HELPFUL HINTS

- Keep essential tools for seabird release with your fishing gear.
- Approach birds from behind where possible.
- Protect your eyes when handling birds.



Go to the bird. Use a landing net to lift the bird on board.



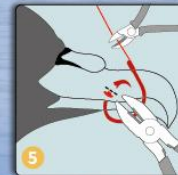
Hold small birds between fingers behind the neck.



Wrap medium sized bird in a towel and cover eyes if possible.



Hold feet firmly. Hold large birds' beak shut, don't cover nostrils or twist the beak.



Cut fishing line. Use pliers to flatten barb or cut hook with small bolt cutters.



Pull the hook back out of the beak.



If hook is swallowed, cut line as close to entry as possible. Fishing line left on bird can tangle it on plants, rocks or other birds.



If bird is exhausted or waterlogged place in loosely covered box to recover.



Release bird at water level.

FOR MORE IDEAS: [WWW.SOUTHERNSEABIRDS.ORG](http://WWW.SOUTHERNSEABIRDS.ORG)

WILDLIFE EMERGENCIES: 0800DOCHOT OR 0800362468