

Fishing Vessel Circular Letter No. 059
07 December 2023
Series: GEN-2023

To: All Ship Owners, Operators, Deputy Registrars, Resident Agents, Representatives, and other Stakeholders

Subject: **MEASURES TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF FISHING FOR ALL FISH STOCKS ON SEABIRDS**

Reference: Issued in accordance with Part VIII, Section 50(1)(c) of the High Seas Fishing Act, 2013

Circular Superseded: FVC-012/2016, Issued 21st April 2016 and FVC-001-2008 issued 9th April 2008

BACKGROUND:

Seabirds are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of fishing activities, including bycatch and competition for food. The incidental capture of seabirds in fishing gear, especially longline and trawl fisheries pose a significant threat to various seabird species. Implementing best practices and using standard mitigation measures in the long line and trawl fishery can significantly reduce the risk of seabird bycatch.

Considering increasing concerns over the impact of fishing activities on seabird populations, it is imperative for all vessel owners to adhere to measures to mitigate the impact of fishing for all fish stocks on seabirds.

MITIGATION MEASURES FOR SEABIRDS IN LONG LINE FISHERIES

The mitigation measures for long line fisheries can be divided into four main categories:

- Avoid fishing in areas and at times when seabird interactions are most likely to occur and intense (**night setting, area and seasonal closure**)
- Limit bird access to baited hooks (**underwater setting funnel, weighted lines, thawed bait, line shooter, bait-casting machines, side-setting**)
- Deter birds from taking baited hooks (**streamer (bird scaring) lines, acoustic deterrents, water cannon**)

- Reduce the attractiveness or visibility of the baited hooks (**dumpling of offal artificial baits, blue-dyed bait**)

Vessel owners are required to utilize one or more of the mitigation measures described above and in our NPOA-Seabirds as it relates to their fishing areas. These measures are also a requirement of the relevant regional fisheries management organizations to which Belize subscribes.

Crewmembers are required to be adequately trained in seabird bycatch mitigation measures aimed at ensuring that seabirds captured alive during long-line fishing are released alive and in as good a condition as possible and that wherever possible hooks are removed without jeopardizing the life of the seabird concerned.

Reporting and Monitoring: maintaining accurate records of seabird interactions and reporting any incidents of bycatch is essential for monitoring effectiveness of mitigation measures and informing future conservation efforts. Owners/operators are required to indicate in their license application form the type of mitigation measures that they will utilize. It is also mandatory for the reporting of all bycatches of seabirds taken in fishing operations to be submitted together with the monthly catch and effort reports.

MITIGATION MEASURES FOR SEABIRDS IN TRAWL FISHERIES

Mitigation measures for trawler vessels are few, but owners and operators are encouraged to implement measures that deter birds from encountering warp, paravane or netsonde cables which are the parts of the trawl that cause most seabird deaths in trawl fisheries.

Three generally utilized devices used in trawler vessels for the mitigation of seabirds are as follows:

- Streamline – this mitigation device is comparable to the streamer lines used on longliners. To adapt these for use on trawlers and deter seabirds from collision with the warp cables, streamer lines are suspended on each side of the warp.
- Warp scarer – this device involves series of rings joined by a length of netting forming a hose around the aerial part of the warp. Streamers hang from each ring to the sea surface, deterring seabirds from colliding with the warp. Streamers hang from each ring to the sea surface, deterring seabirds from colliding with the warp.
- Brady baffler – the baffler is designed to prevent seabirds from scavenging for offal from congregating at the stern where the warp cables enter the water. It is attached to each of the two quarters of the stern

gantry and consists of two horizontal steel arms, one aft of the stern and one outboard. Ropes with plastic cones at the seaward end hand form the arms.

While not mandatory, owners/operators of trawler vessels are encouraged to adopt measures that mitigate the impact on seabirds in their trawl fisheries and to report the measure(s) they have on board, even if it is different from those mentioned above.

Failure to comply with these measures not only poses a threat to seabird populations but also carries legal implications. It is the responsibility of every vessel owner/operator to actively participate in efforts to mitigate the impacts of fishing on seabirds.

APPLICABILITY

Circulars setting out mandatory requirements shall be construed to have the same effect and applicability of rules and policies under the provisions of the HSFA 2013. Each circular is applicable to all Belize flagged fishing vessels engaged in fishing and related activities. The owner, operator and master of every Belize flagged fishing vessel shall be familiar with all applicable Circulars applying to their vessel and it shall be no defense that any person in breach of any Circular was not aware of it or has not been advised of it.

MAINTENANCE

Ship owners, and operators shall ensure that all Circulars are disseminated to their master and crew as well as any other person affected by or having an interest in the subject matter in a language understood by all. A Circular once issued shall be disseminated electronically to all stakeholders and a listing of ALL Circulars shall be published on the BHSFU website www.bhsfu.gov.bz for future reference.

COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

Failure to comply with any Circular shall result in disciplinary actions taken in accordance with Belize's Sanction Regulations S.I. 32 of 2014

IMPLEMENTATION

This circular shall take effect immediately.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information direct all inquiries about this Circular to the Director of High Seas Fisheries of the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit, Ministry of Finance, Government of Belize.

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