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| **Seabirds are an angler’s best friend** |  |

It’s often said that a man’s best friend is a dog, but when it comes to fishing nothing beats seabirds. Circling or diving seabirds are good indicators that life is not far below the water’s surface. Fishers get excited when the birds are “working” and will often head towards the action to join in the marauding.

Seabirds use their excellent sense of smell and sharp eyesight to spot “meatballs”, tight swarms of baitfish being driven to the surface by bigger predators such as kahawai and kingfish. In the warmer months these meatballs can be accompanied by larger hunters such as marlin, tuna and other pelagics.

New Zealand has more types of breeding seabirds than anywhere else in the world, and some of them are rarer than our kiwi. On the east coast of the North Island it is common practice for fishers to spend a whole day chasing “working birds” and schooling fish. It is this interaction between humans and seabirds that causes their demise.

Seabirds can get tangled in fishing line and nets or caught on hooks, and if a breeding adult is injured or killed its chick will die of starvation.

And just like an undersized fish, the way you treat a hooked seabird can make all the difference to its survival. Fortunately, the gear you use to release a seabird is very similar to the gear we use when fishing so it is up to fishers to learn some simple techniques.

Making small changes to the way we all fish can make a big difference to seabird survival rates, and you might catch more fish too.

Seabird survival tips:

1. Fish tidy. Clean the decks and put any scraps or bait in a bucket or bins.
2. Fish fast. Use a heavy sinker on your rig to quickly get the bait past diving sea birds.
3. Bait choice is important. Change the size or type of bait, soft baits tend to be less attractive than fleshy baits.
4. Burley well below the birds. Sink burley containers deep, below the birds and closer to the fish.
5. Deter birds from your gear. Create a ‘safe zone’ around your fishing area using streamers or a quick, regular blast of the deck hose.
6. Move on. If the birds are not deterred from your gear take a break or move to another spot.
7. Fish at either end of the day. There are fewer birds around at night or early morning.
8. Be mindful of where you fish. Move away from seabird colonies and their feeding paths.
9. Read the [Safe Release Seabird Guidelines](http://legasea.co.nz/documents/safe-seabird-release.pdf) issued by Southern Seabird Solutions Trust to learn –
   1. How to de-hook a captured bird.
   2. What to do if a bird has swallowed a hook.

Seabirds are nature’s fish finders and a Kiwi anger’s best friend. Let’s do our best to look after our seabirds and marine environment.

**More information**

Website: [www.fishcare.co.nz](http://www.fishcare.co.nz)

LegaSea: [www.legasea.co.nz](http://www.legasea.co.nz)

Southern Seabirds: [www.southernseabirds.org](http://www.southernseabirds.org)

LegaSea: 0800 LEGASEA (534 273)

Wildlife emergencies: 0800 DOCHOT (362 468)