

Operation Hippocamp - Summary

1. The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) conducted Operation Hippocamp between February and March 2012.
2. Results of the investigation were collated in a report to MPI. This report remained confidential until May 2016.
3. Operation Hippocamp gathered catch information to determine the level of dumping and high grading in the trawl and setnet fishery off the south and southeast coast of the South Island, with a focus on the gurnard and elephant fish fisheries.
4. During the investigation information on catch and the size of fish was gathered on-board, as the fish were landed. This at sea data was compared with landed catch at the wharf or in Licenced Fish Receiver (LFR) premises, fish sorting-packing sheds.
5. All commercial catch of gurnard and elephant fish must be landed.
6. The difference between on-board catch and landed catch would indicate the extent of dumping and high grading in the inshore fishery off the southeast and south coast of the South Island.

REPORT CONCLUSION

There is significant illegal dumping and high grading in the South Island's south-eastern inshore commercial fishery. MPI must confront and address these problems.

FINDINGS

Gurnard

1. Between one third and two thirds of gurnard, by number, were illegally dumped at sea.
2. All vessels caught gurnard over a fairly wide range of sizes.
3. MPI found significant differences between the samples of gurnard measured and counted at sea, and what was landed.
4. A large portion of small gurnard were not landed. One vessel landed few fish below 37cm.
5. Licenced Fish Receivers (LFRs) paid more for larger fish, over 32cm in length, and no specific price for fish under 28cm. The price variation seems to have influenced what size fish are landed. (Incentive to high grade, dump smaller fish for bigger ones.)

Elephant fish

1. Trawlers catch a wide range of sizes of elephant fish.
2. Some trawlers are catching small elephant fish, below 50cm in length, but not landing them.
3. Fishermen earn more for elephant fish over 50cm in length. Port price seems to have influenced the size of fish landed. (Incentive to high grade, dump smaller fish for bigger ones.)
4. One vessel discarded all small elephant fish.