

BIRDS OF A FEATHER: INTERNATIONAL TEAMWORK ADDRESSING SEABIRD BYCATCH ON THE HIGH SEAS



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Abstract: In recent years, concerns about seabird bycatch in large-scale international fisheries have prompted several regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) to take actions to assess and mitigate the impacts of fisheries on seabird populations. While progress-to-date among RFMOs varies widely, there is at least one thing in common among all of them – a concerted effort by the international conservation community and interested nations to work together to seek rigorous impact assessments and the application of best practices for minimizing seabird bycatch. Working closely together, individual nations, such as the United States, as well as those organized by their membership in the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, and well-respected international conservation organizations, such as BirdLife International, have provided expert advice and recommendations to RFMOs for use in addressing seabird bycatch. RFMOs currently addressing seabird bycatch include: the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), the International Convention on the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission. While CCAMLR has achieved unprecedented success in reducing seabird bycatch, in the next few years, the other RFMOs will be faced with serious challenges to do the same. This poster provides snapshots of the progress-to-date on addressing seabird bycatch in each of these RFMOs and provides outlooks for the future in terms of likely outcomes and impacts to the most vulnerable seabird populations in the world.

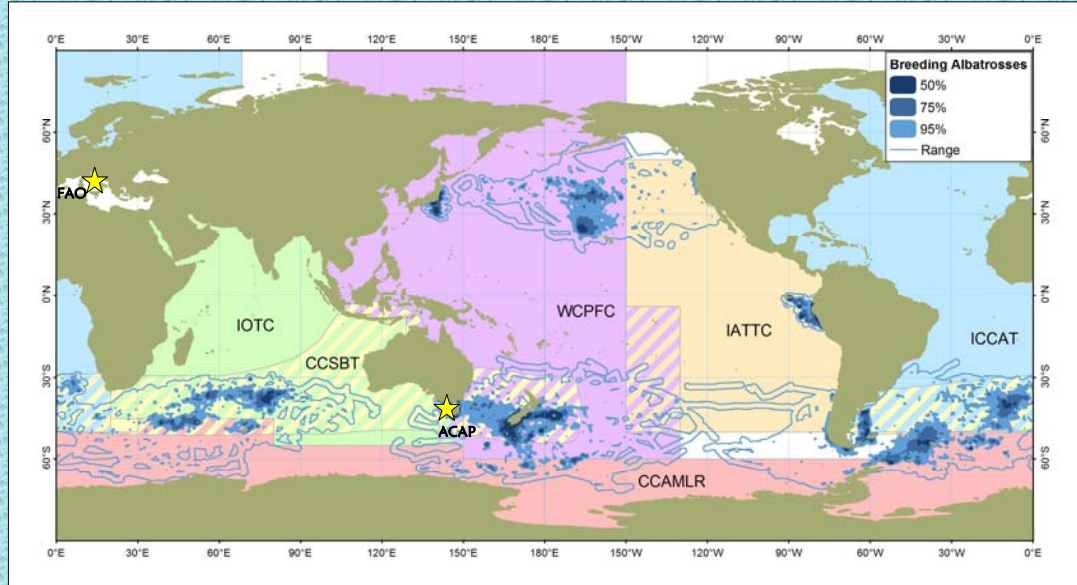
WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC FISHERIES COMMISSION (WCPFC) In 2006, the WCPFC passed a seabird conservation measure which requires longline vessels to use two mitigation measures to reduce seabird bycatch, selected from a menu that includes bird scaring lines, side setting with a bird curtain and weighted branch lines, night-setting, weighted branch lines, blue dyed bait, management of offal discharge, a deep line setting shooter, or an underwater setting chute. At its annual meeting in 2007, the Commission adopted minimum technical specifications for using these measures and required nations to provide details regarding the use of the measures, so that their effectiveness may be annually reviewed.

INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC) In 2006, the IOTC adopted Resolution 06/04 which requires all vessels fishing south of the parallel of latitude 30° South to carry and use bird-scaring lines to reduce seabird bycatch. However, longline vessels targeting swordfish using the "American longline system" are currently exempt. In 2007, the IOTC's Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch recommended that IOTC require longline vessels to use a combination of two measures, selected from a 'menu' of seabird mitigation measures. This recommendation was endorsed by the IOTC's Scientific Committee, and forwarded for consideration by the IOTC Commission at its next meeting in 2008.



Photo by: Andy Rouse Wildlife Photography

UNITED NATIONS' FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO) In 1997 the FAO hosted an expert consultation on reducing seabird-fishery interactions in the world's longline fisheries. This led to the adoption in 1999 of the International Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (IPOA-Seabirds). The IPOA-Seabirds calls upon nations to assess and mitigate seabird bycatch in longline fisheries. Today, Brazil, Canada, Chile, New Zealand, Falkland Islands (Malvinas), Japan, and the United States have submitted final National Plans of Action (NPOA) to the FAO. Others are in development (e.g. Argentina, Australia, Namibia, South Africa, Taiwan, and Uruguay). In 2008, the FAO will support a workshop, co-hosted by BirdLife International, to further develop best practice for NPOAs, and may expand the scope to include other fisheries such as trawls. CCAMLR, IATTC, ICCAT, IOTC, and WCPFC have all passed resolutions to encourage their members to implement the IPOA.



[Figure note: The density distribution contours for breeding albatrosses indicate the core ocean areas used by albatrosses during the breeding season. The 50% contour indicates areas of highest concentration, within which breeding albatrosses spend 50% of their time. The 95% contour is the larger area which encompasses 95% of breeding albatross distribution.]

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT) has had a Sub-Committee on Bycatch since 1996, and in 2002 passed Seabird Resolution 02-14, which encourages ICCAT members to collect data on seabird bycatch and to undertake NPOAs. In 2007, ICCAT began an assessment of the impact of its longline fisheries on Atlantic seabird populations, which will be completed in 2008. In the meantime in 2007, ICCAT passed a measure requiring longline vessels to use a bird scaring line when fishing south of 20° S. Swordfish vessels must set lines at night and use at least 60g line-weight. The measure indicates that ICCAT will consider further seabird bycatch mitigation requirements in 2008.



Photo by: BirdLife International File Photo

COMMISSION FOR CONSERVATION OF ANTARCTIC MARINE LIVING RESOURCES (CCAMLR) is responsible for regulating fishing in the Southern Ocean and is home to many of the most fishery-affected albatross populations (e.g., at South Georgia, Iles Crozet, Kerguelen and Prince Edward Islands). CCAMLR has led the way in international seabird mitigation measures by instituting mandatory seabird avoidance measures beginning in 1991. They include: streamer lines of a specified standard, night-setting, weighting longlines so gear sinks rapidly beyond the reach of birds, prohibition of offal discharge during gear deployment, removal of hooks from offal or fish heads prior to discharge, and a time/area fishing closure around South Georgia (home to wandering albatross (*Diomedea exulans*), grey-headed albatross (*Thalassarche chrysostoma*), & black-browed albatross (*T. melanophrys*)). Bycatch around South Georgia was as high as 5,755 birds in 1997, but has since been reduced to zero birds reported caught in the last 2 years. **Key to CCAMLR's success** have been: 1) placement of **independent scientific observers on vessels**. 2) creation of a **formal working group** which comprised all stakeholder constituencies – fishers, fishery managers, fishery scientists, technical experts, seabird biologists – to analyse and assess data and to provide advice (the working group on Incidental Mortality Associated with Fishing), 3) **collaborative research into practical solutions involving fishing companies and scientists** and supported by governments, and 4) an **annual risk assessment process** that considers impacts of both longline and trawl fisheries on CCAMLR seabirds. Since 2003, CCAMLR has required trawl vessels to engage seabird avoidance practices. More recently, CCAMLR has worked with ACAP. An increasing recognition of the CCAMLR process and recommendations as 'role models' is leading to the uptake of CCAMLR-style seabird avoidance measures in other parts of the world.

AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS (ACAP) is a multilateral international agreement whose objective is to achieve and maintain a favorable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels by coordinating international action to mitigate threats to their survival. **There are currently eleven Parties to the Agreement: Australia, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, France, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom and one Signatory, Brazil.** Incidental mortality resulting from

commercial fishing activities is a key threat to many populations of albatrosses and petrels and ACAP is increasingly becoming involved at RFMOs providing expert advice on bycatch mitigation measures that will reduce or eliminate this threat. ACAP also seeks to address other threats that may adversely affect albatross and petrel populations, such as degradation and disturbance of their habitats, pollution, reduction of food resources, and the use and abandonment of non-selective fishing gear.



Photo by: BirdLife International's Albatross Task Force

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION (IATTC) adopted Resolution C-05-01 in 2005 which asks Parties to report on the status of their National Plans of Action under the IPOA-Seabirds and to collect and provide the Commission with all information on seabird bycatch in IATTC fisheries. The resolution also calls on the IATTC's Stock Assessment Working Group (SAWG) to conduct an assessment of the impact of seabird bycatch on populations. The SAWG has addressed these issues for the past two years and has identified species of concern: in particular waved albatross (*Phoebastria irrorata*), Laysan albatross (*P. immutabilis*), black-footed albatross (*P. nigripes*), and also several species from New Zealand which over-winter in the South-East Pacific. BirdLife International has provided information on albatross distribution through its Global Procellariiform Tracking Database. To date, IATTC has not required mandatory seabird avoidance measures for its longline fleet.

COMMISSION ON THE CONSERVATION OF SOUTHERN BLUEFIN TUNA (CCSBT) manages stocks of southern bluefin tuna, which is concentrated between 30 - 50° South, in all oceans, and has a high degree of overlap with albatross distribution. In 1995, CCSBT was the first tuna commission to establish a seabird bycatch mitigation measure, requiring its longline vessels to use a bird-scaring line south of 30° South. However, there is serious concerns about the lack of progress since then. It has proven difficult to get agreement among CCSBT members to establish a system to monitor the compliance with, or effectiveness of, this measure and as yet that there are no mandatory requirements for collection of data on bycatch.

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