

11TH MEETING OF THE SPRFMO COMMISSION

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COMM 11 – Obs 04

Update to SPRFMO on reducing seabird bycatch in fisheries

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels



Agreement on the Conservation
of Albatrosses and Petrels

ACAP update on reducing seabird bycatch in fisheries

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)¹

Abstract

The incidental mortality (bycatch) of seabirds in longline and trawl fisheries continues to be a serious global concern, especially for threatened albatrosses and petrels, resulting in a Conservation Crisis being declared by the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) in 2019. This paper provides an update on ACAP resources relevant to seabird bycatch mitigation in trawl and demersal longline fisheries as well as other guidelines. Noting that ACAP has continued to update its advice on seabird bycatch mitigation and has developed new guidelines for observer programmes, a detailed review of SPRFMO CMMs 09-2017 and 02-2022 may be timely to ensure continued alignment with best practice advice.

Background

The incidental mortality (bycatch) of seabirds in longline and trawl fisheries continues to be a serious global concern, especially for threatened albatrosses and petrels. The need for international cooperation in addressing this concern was a major reason for establishing the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP www.acap.aq/agreement-text).

Some of the particular concerns and points of discussion by ACAP Parties in relation to seabird bycatch and its mitigation include the following:

- Disappointment that, despite all the research and attention devoted to the development of best practice bycatch mitigation measures, these have not been used sufficiently extensively to stop the decline in the numbers of many albatross and petrel species. In addition, many RFMO CMMs have not been updated to take account of the continual development of ACAP advice based on the latest research. ACAP Parties accordingly support the regular provision of updated ACAP advice to RFMOs.
- Acknowledgement that many RFMOs and national authorities have put in place at least some measures to reduce seabird bycatch, but that compliance and enforcement are often inadequate or insufficiently demonstrated. Whilst ACAP continues to review and update

¹ Secretariat to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, Level 2, 119 Macquarie Street, Hobart, 7000, Tasmania, Australia. secretariat@acap.aq

advice on best practice mitigation, we are now also giving a greater focus to working with others to identify ways of strengthening compliance with conservation measures adopted. Compliance with required seabird bycatch mitigation measures is an area that needs much greater attention. ACAP is keen to assist where it can to contribute ideas on how to improve monitoring and compliance, including through the development of innovative methods.

- We are encouraged by the fact that within jurisdictions where enforcement has occurred, reductions in seabird bycatch were demonstrated, sometimes dramatically so, and without the perceived detrimental consequences arising. This is a clear indication that the crisis can be successfully addressed.

ACAP cooperates with SPRFMO through a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the two Secretariats, which was signed in October 2014.

ACAP advice for reducing bycatch of seabirds in fisheries

There have been significant efforts internationally to develop mitigation measures to avoid or minimise the risk of incidental catch of seabirds in longline fisheries. Much of ACAP's Seabird Bycatch Working Group (SBWG) work focuses on routinely reviewing and updating best practice mitigation advice for industrial fishing gear types (principally pelagic and demersal longline, and trawl gear). The most recent review took place in August 2021, at the 10th meeting of the Seabird Bycatch Working Group (SBWG10), with updates endorsed by the 12th Meeting of ACAP's Advisory Committee (AC12). The ACAP review process recognises that factors such as safety, practicality and the characteristics of the fishery should also be taken into account when considering the efficacy of seabird bycatch mitigation measures and consequently in the development of advice and guidelines on best practice.

ACAP recommends that the most effective way to reduce seabird bycatch in demersal longline fisheries is to use the following three best practice measures simultaneously: use of an appropriate line weighting regime to sink baited hooks as close to the vessel as possible to reduce their availability to seabirds, actively deterring birds from baited hooks by means of bird scaring lines, and setting longlines at night. For trawl fisheries, ACAP recommends a number of options to reduce the general attractiveness of fishing operations to seabirds through management of offal and discards as well as measures to reduce cable strikes. Full details can be found in the [ACAP Review of Mitigation Measures and Best Practice Advice for Reducing the Impact of Demersal Longline Fisheries on Seabirds](#) and [ACAP Review of Mitigation Measures and Best Practice Advice for Reducing the Impact of Pelagic and Demersal Trawl Fisheries on Seabirds](#) available from the ACAP website.

SPRFMO has recognised the need to reduce seabird bycatch and adopted SPRFMO Conservation and Management Measure for minimising the bycatch of seabirds in the SPRFMO Convention Area ([CMM 09-217](#)). SPRFMO has also recognised the need for a range of related data collection, reporting and verification (as part of [CMM 02-2022](#)). Arguably the single most

important action to reduce bycatch is to ensure full compliance with the proper use of existing seabird bycatch regulations, such as SPRFMO CMM 09-2017.

Mitigation methods detailed in SPRFMO CMM 09-2017 were developed noting ACAP best practice advice at the time. A detailed assessment comparing the measures outlined in CMM 09-2017 and current ACAP best practice advice may provide a useful framework to identify any opportunities to further improve the CMM and ultimately further reduce the impact of SPRFMO fisheries on seabirds.

ACAP guidelines on seabird bycatch monitoring

The 12th meeting of the ACAP Advisory Committee held in September 2021 (AC12) endorsed [data collection guidelines for observer programmes](#) and [Guidelines on electronic monitoring systems](#). The guidelines for observer programmes include recommended standard protocols for observation of warp strikes in trawl fisheries, and conducting seabird abundance counts, which can enrich the assessment of risk posed to seabirds by fisheries. A detailed assessment comparing the seabird bycatch related data collection outlined in CMM 02-2022 against the new ACAP guidelines may be useful to ensure that SPRFMO's data collection is well targeted to understand the nature and extent of seabird bycatch, and that it aligns with data collection by other RFMOs and jurisdictions.

Other relevant ACAP resources

As well as resources specifically targeted at fishers and fishery managers, such as [best practice mitigation](#) and [bycatch monitoring advice](#) for industrial fishing gear types, and the [ACAP-BirdLife bycatch mitigation factsheets](#), ACAP produces a range of advice, guidelines and resources aimed at furthering the conservation of albatrosses and petrels. In particular, resources developed around [Seabird Identification](#) and [Safe Handling and Release](#) are relevant to SPRFMO fisheries. All are available from the ACAP website (www.acap.aq).

AC12 also endorsed [Light Pollution Guidelines for Wildlife](#) developed by Australia. The guidelines aim to raise awareness of the potential impacts of artificial light on wildlife, including seabirds, and provide a framework for assessing and managing these impacts.

Other recently developed resources include '[Sampling guidelines to assess plastic ingestion in ACAP species](#)' and [Guidelines for working with albatrosses and petrels during H5N1 avian influenza outbreak](#), which were added in July 2022 in response to the rapid spread of H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI) in the northern hemisphere and the unprecedented impacts on seabird populations. All sites where ACAP-listed species congregate may be at risk of exposure via migratory birds or accidental introduction by human activities, and banders, researchers and the tourism sector should thus be in a state of alertness.