



**COMMISSION
SIXTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**
Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea
5-11 December 2019

**ACAP STATEMENT ON REDUCING SEABIRD BYCATCH IN PELAGIC LONGLINE
FISHERIES**

**WCPFC16-2019-OP08
26 November 2019**

Submitted by Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels¹

Abstract

The incidental mortality of seabirds in pelagic longline 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, <https://acap.aq/>). ACAP presented a background paper ([WCPFC-SC15-2019/EB-IP-03](#)) to the meeting of the Fifteenth WCPFC Scientific Committee in August 2019 in which we provided an update on ACAP's advice on mitigation of seabird bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries. The paper summarised updated ACAP advice on mitigation and identified new areas of focus to address the continuing conservation crisis facing albatrosses and petrels, and the need for urgent and increased efforts to counter this crisis. This paper reiterates for the WCPFC Commission the main points made in that paper, including ACAP's continuing emphasis on exploring with our colleagues in Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, and others, ways to work together more effectively to reduce bycatch of albatrosses and petrels in fishing operations and improve the conservation status of these threatened seabirds.

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

Introduction and background

The incidental mortality of seabirds in pelagic longline 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). There have been significant efforts internationally to develop mitigation measures to avoid or minimise the risk of incidental catch of seabirds in longline fisheries. Although most mitigation measures are broadly applicable, the application and specifications of some will vary with local methods and gear configurations. ACAP routinely reviews the scientific literature dealing with seabird bycatch mitigation in pelagic longline fisheries. ACAP 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. The most recent review was conducted in May 2019 at the Ninth Meeting of the ACAP Seabird Bycatch Working Group, with the recommendations of the review adopted by the Eleventh Meeting of its Advisory Committee. Paper [WCPFC-SC15-2019/EB-IP-03](#) provided details of ACAP's updated advice.

The main outcomes of the 2019 ACAP meetings

In the first two weeks of May 2019 ACAP held, in Florianópolis, Brazil, the 11th meeting of its Advisory Committee, preceded by meetings of its Working Groups on Seabird Bycatch and on Population and Conservation Status. These meetings discussed priorities for ACAP's work programme, including its engagement with RFMOs – a key element of ACAP's work. The reports from these the meetings are available on the ACAP website:

[11th meeting of ACAP's Advisory Committee](#) (AC11)

[Ninth meeting of ACAP's Seabird Bycatch Working Group](#) (SBWG9)

[Fifth meeting of ACAP's Population and Conservation Status Working Group](#) (PaCSWG5)

ACAP's advice for reducing the impact of pelagic longline fisheries on seabirds was reviewed and updated at the 2019 meetings. The updates were relatively minor, and the current version of ACAP's advice is available on the [ACAP website](#).

ACAP has developed and adopted new advice on improving safety when hauling branchlines during pelagic fishing operations, which can be downloaded from the [ACAP website](#). Also available on the [ACAP website](#) are guidelines for removing fishing hooks from bycaught birds. Additional information on safe handling and release guidelines for seabirds is provided in [WCPFC-SC15-2019-EB-WP-10](#). As noted in EB-WP-10, intersessional work is underway to develop safe handling and release guidelines for birds entangled in nets. This will be relevant to capture of live birds in purse seine nets. ACAP continues to update the ACAP-BirdLife [bycatch mitigation fact sheets](#), and an updated [Seabird Bycatch Identification Guide](#) will also be available soon.

The 2019 ACAP meetings highlighted the urgency of addressing the conservation crisis that continues to be faced by albatrosses and petrels, with fisheries bycatch remaining a primary threat. ACAP's efforts to counter this crisis will involve a change of focus in some cases and taking advantage of ongoing innovations in, for example, technology. Some of these efforts will be relevant to ACAP's interaction with RFMOs such as the WCPFC, since the only way to tackle the crisis is by working together.

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.
- The meeting considered it sufficiently important to spend considerable time discussing why there had been insufficient uptake of best practice or even implementation of required bycatch mitigation measures.
- The discussion acknowledged that many RFMOs and national authorities have put in place at least some measures to reduce seabird bycatch, but that compliance and enforcement were often inadequate. ACAP is now 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.

One of our immediate objectives is to communicate urgently the message that albatrosses and petrels are in a dire conservation state, and that urgent action is required to improve their status. We also want to give greater emphasis to success stories, to convey the message that through cooperation and sharing our experience, we can work together to solve the conservation crisis,

The WCPFC has recognised the need to reduce seabird bycatch and recently adopted WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure to mitigate the impact of fishing for highly migratory fish stocks on seabirds ([CMM 2018/03](#)). Arguably the single most important action to reduce bycatch is to increase compliance in the proper use of existing seabird bycatch regulations, such as WCPFC CMM 2018/03.

World Albatross Day, to be celebrated for the first time on 19 June 2020, will be one opportunity to highlight the efforts being made and the immediacy of making sure they succeed.