

**THE UNITED STATES IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR
REDUCING INCIDENTAL CATCH OF SEABIRDS IN LONGLINE FISHERIES
(IPOA-Seabirds)**

**Information prepared for the 26th Meeting of FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI)
March 7-11, 2005**

The United States completed its National Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (NPOA-Seabirds) in February 2001, and it can be downloaded at www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds/national.htm. Given their respective domestic authorities, the NPOA-Seabirds was developed collaboratively by the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Department of State. Individuals may consult the same website for information on a variety of national and international initiatives to implement the IPOA-Seabirds. Various international initiatives are also detailed in the attachment to this document.

RELEVANT AGENDA ITEM AT THE 26TH COFI MEETING

Item 4. Progress Report on the Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and Related International Plans of Action (Capacity, IUU Fishing, Seabirds and Sharks), and the Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries: *for discussion and decision*. See <http://www.fao.org/fi/body/cofi/cofi.asp> for information on FAO, COFI, and the COFI-26 meeting documents, including the agenda.

BACKGROUND

Seabirds continue to be incidentally taken in longline fisheries, particularly albatross and petrel species, many of which are populations at risk. The IPOA-Seabirds, adopted by FAO in 1999, calls for longline fishery assessments to be conducted and NPOA-Seabirds to be developed. NPOAs could include: data collection programs (e.g. onboard observers collecting data on seabird incidental catch), prescribed mitigation measures, mitigation research, outreach, and education and training. International cooperation is key to the success of IPOA-Seabirds. The U.S. has completed its National Plan of Action and international elements are included and are being implemented. Yet, to date, few members have developed NPOAs and few RFMOs have adequately addressed actions to reduce the incidental catch of seabirds. With respect to activities of international organizations and RFMOs: seabird avoidance mitigation measures were required by CCAMLR in 1991 and CCSBT in 1996. Seabird resolutions were adopted by ICCAT in 2002 and CCAMLR in 1989 and 2004, mostly encouraging voluntary actions. FAO has provided financial assistance to Brazil and South Africa for NPOA development and has also co-hosted a regional South American workshop with BirdLife International to promote development of effective NPOAs. From a seabird conservation perspective, the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP) has entered into force and provides for legally binding mechanisms to address various threats to albatrosses and petrels, including the incidental catch in fisheries.

In the past several years, various international conferences and workshops have addressed the seabird/fishery issue. Some of these include: International Fishers Forum (2000 in New Zealand, 2002 in US), Regional Technical Workshop on Seabird By-catch and Mitigation (2003 in Taiwan), Global Procellariiform Tracking Workshop (2003 in South Africa), FAO/BirdLife South American Workshop on Implementation of NPOA-Seabirds and Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (2003 in Chile), 4th International Fisheries Observer Conference (2004 in Australia), and the 3rd International Conference on Albatrosses and Petrels (2004 in Uruguay). Each of these arenas has acknowledged FAO's IPOA-Seabirds and identified the urgent need for its implementation and international coordination.

The Fourth Meeting of Regional Fishery Bodies (RFB) will follow COFI-26 and the Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries. Several RFB agenda items will allow for input which relates to the IPOA-Seabirds: 1) the global role of RFBs in promoting responsible fisheries management consistent with the objectives of the

FAO Code of Conduct, 2) how RFBs can contribute regional cooperation, knowledge and expertise by involvement in communicating the effects of external factors on fisheries; and 3) approaches to incorporate ecosystem considerations into fisheries management by RFBs. The FAO Secretariat will brief the RFB participants on the outcome of COFI-26. On Monday, March 14, a noon-time presentation will occur, entitled “IPOA-Seabirds: Implementation by Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs).”

Relevant Seabird Items for COFI-26:

- Attendance by COFI delegates to a US-organized side session, “*IPOA-Seabirds: Best Practices for NPOA Development*” on Thursday, March 10 (1:00pm to 2:30pm in the Ethiopia Room C285/89) for an NPOA-Seabirds overview and learn about ‘best practices’ in developing NPOA-Seabirds.
- Encouragement of FAO to host additional regional technical workshops (e.g. South America in 2003) and to continue to make its resources (e.g. FishCode) available to assist members in the development of NPOA-Seabirds.
- Encourage COFI to call upon States directly through NPOAs to conduct assessments of incidental catch of seabirds in longline fisheries and to prescribe mitigation measures of known effectiveness for those fisheries where a seabird incidental catch problem occurs.
- Encourage COFI to call upon participants at the upcoming Regional Fishery Bodies (RFB) meeting to address ecosystem management approaches that include RFMOs conducting assessments of incidental catch of seabirds in longline fisheries and prescribing mitigation measures of known effectiveness for those fisheries where a seabird incidental catch problem occurs. This in essence is a call for RFMOs to establish Plans of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries.

Attachment

ACAP 2004

- The First Meeting of the Parties (MOP1) of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) was held in Hobart, Australia, 10-12 November 2004. An informal scientific meeting was held 8-9 November 2004 and provided scientific advice to MOP1.
- ACAP is a legally binding agreement under the umbrella of CMS and it entered into force in February 2004. See the ACAP website (www.acap.aq) for the text of the agreement, Annex 1 (list of albatross and petrel species protected under ACAP), Annex 2 (Action Plan), and various documents tabled for the MOP1 and the informal scientific meeting.
- *Parties present:* Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, UK. (Ecuador absent). *Signatories present:* Argentina, Brazil, France. (Chile and Peru absent). *Range States present:* Namibia, Norway, United States. (Range State as defined by ACAP means any State that exercises jurisdiction over any part of the range of albatrosses or petrels, or a State, flag vessels of which are engaged outside its national jurisdictional limits in taking, or which have the potential to take, albatrosses and petrels.)
- MOP1 agreed to recommend to its Advisory Committee that it set up 2 working groups---one to address ACAP taxonomic issues and the other to address issues of population status, trends, and demography.
- With respect to the Action Plan, it was proposed that the main focus of the initial work of the Advisory Committee be on fisheries interactions (particularly strategies for collaborating with RFMOs), work on eradication of non-native species injurious to albatrosses and petrels, and work on the management and protection status of breeding sites and identification of internationally important breeding sites.
- Although the US is not a signatory to ACAP, the US will continue to participate as an observer to this primarily Southern Hemisphere agreement, and see how ACAP functions and progresses. While the US is a “range state”, it has limited fishing operations in Southern Oceans. Currently, the species protected under ACAP occur in the Southern Hemisphere. The albatross and petrel species breeding in the Northern Hemisphere are not included in ACAP’s Annex 1.

CCAMLR 2004

- Commission adopts Resolution 23/XXIII: International actions to reduce the incidental mortality of seabirds arising from fishing.
<http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds/ccamlrres22-xxiiiinew.pdf>
- Commission noted that greatest current threat to species and populations of Southern Ocean seabirds breeding in the Convention Area is mortality in longline fisheries in waters outside the Convention Area and recognized that fisheries in high-seas waters outside the Convention Area are regulated by RFMOs.
- Invites listed RFMOs to implement or develop, as appropriate, mechanisms to require the collection, reporting and dissemination of data on incidental mortality of seabirds (e.g rates of incidental mortality of seabirds associated with each fishery; details of the seabird species involved, and estimates of total seabird ; measures to minimise or avoid mortality of seabirds that are in use in each fishery and the extent to which any of these are voluntary or mandatory, together with an assessment of their effectiveness; the nature of scientific observer programs, including observer coverage, associated with each fishery.
- For areas where such mechanisms are currently unavailable or where systematic data reporting has not commenced, requests Flag States conducting longline fishing (or other fishing methods) outside the Convention Area, which incidentally take seabirds of species breeding in the Convention Area, to provide the CCAMLR Secretariat with summary data as specified above.
- Urges Members that are also members of listed RFMOs to: request that the topic of seabird incidental mortality be included on the agenda of pertinent meetings of each RFMO and, where appropriate, to send relevant experts to these meetings; identify those areas and circumstances within the listed RFMOs where incidental mortality of seabirds occurs; identify those mitigation

measures which would be most effective at reducing or eliminating such mortality and to require such measures to be implemented in the relevant fisheries.

- Encourages Flag States involved with new and developing RFMOs to request that incidental mortality of seabirds (and other by-catch taxa as appropriate) is adequately addressed and mitigated. Appropriate initiatives might include: establishment or expansion of existing observer programs and adoption of appropriate data collection protocols on seabird incidental mortality; establishment of by-catch working groups that will address incidental mortality issues and make recommendations for suitable, practicable, and effective mitigation measures, including evaluation of established and innovative technologies and techniques; evaluations of fishery impacts on the affected seabird populations; cooperate (e.g. on data exchange) with listed RFMOs.

ICCAT 2003-2004

- Implementation of ICCAT's 2002 resolution on the incidental mortality of seabirds has progressed slowly. The resolution urges contracting parties to inform the SCRS of the status of NPOA-Seabirds, urges implementation of IPOA-Seabirds; encourages contracting parties to collect and voluntarily provide SCRS with all available information on interactions with seabirds, including incidental catches in all fisheries under the purview of ICCAT; and that SCRS should, when feasible and appropriate, present to the Commission an assessment of the impact of incidental catch of seabirds resulting from the activities of all vessels fishing for tunas and tuna-like species, in the Convention Area. Few parties have made reports to ICCAT addressing the seabird resolution.
- The US sponsored a booth on incidental catch of non-target species at the ICCAT Annual Meeting in 2004 and information on seabirds was well-received by participants.
- The seabird section of the US's 2004 National Report to ICCAT is posted at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds/seabirdnpoa2004rptICCATv2.pdf>

Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Plan 2004-2005

- USFWS formed a short-tailed albatross recovery team in 2003 under the auspices of the Endangered Species Act to delineate actions that are required to recover and protect this listed species. The international team (US, Japan, Australia) has developed a recovery plan that will be made available by USFWS in early 2005. US Congressional appropriations (\$1.5M) are available for implementation of the plan.
- The short-tailed albatross breeds exclusively in Japan and forages in the Northern Pacific Ocean (EEZs of Japan, Russia, US). At the turn of the century, the population was estimated in the millions but was subsequently decimated and brought to near extinction as a result of hunting at the breeding colonies in Japan. Currently, the population is estimated at about 2,000 individuals and is increasing.
- Fishery interactions (e.g. longline, trawl, gillnet) are identified as threats to this species and the recovery plan will address fishery-related research, mitigation, and management activities. Some of the other threats include: habitat loss, volcanic activity on primary breeding colony, contaminants, and plastics ingestion.

International Fishers Forum

Advance notice of IFF3 was provided in December 2004 at www.fishersforum.org. International Fishers Conference on Responsible Fisheries and IFF3. A date in 2005 (or 2006) is being finalized. The Organization for the Promotion of Responsible Tuna Fisheries (OPRT) http://www2.convention.co.jp/maguro/e_maguro/ is sponsoring IFF3 with support from the Japan Fisheries Research Agency, Federation of Japan Tuna Fisheries Co-operative Associations, and Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. Objective is: Longline fishermen, scientists and administrative

people of government meet and discuss on conduct of responsible fisheries and exchange information on gear modifications and techniques to mitigate incidental catches such as sea turtles and seabirds.

International Workshops & Conferences

- *DEVELOP BEST PRACTICES FOR THE COLLECTION OF LONGLINE DATA TO FACILITATE RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS TO REDUCE BYCATCH LONGLINE WORKSHOP AT 4TH INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES OBSERVER CONFERENCE, NOVEMBER 8, 2004, MANLY BEACH (SYDNEY), AUSTRALIA*

Recent workshops on the bycatch of sea turtles, marine mammals, and seabirds in longline fisheries have generated recommendations regarding the need for standardized data collections to facilitate scientific research and the development and implementation of strategies to reduce bycatch. Consistently collected information would facilitate improved assessments of fishing impacts on bycatch species, while allowing better research and development of gear modifications or changes in fishing practices to reduce bycatch and would also be helpful for reducing bycatch of other non-target species, such as marine mammals, billfish, sharks, etc.

To facilitate implementation of recommendations regarding consistency in data collections, this workshop brought together scientists involved in research and data analysis of longline fishery bycatch, managers of longline fishery observer programs, fisheries managers, and other interested parties to identify key data elements and/or biological samples that should be collected in longline fisheries worldwide. An objective of the workshop was to identify core data elements that should be collected in all observed longline fisheries. A workshop summary report is being prepared and will be made available spring 2005.

- FAO and BirdLife International hosted a South American regional workshop in Chile in December 2003 to address the implementation of NPOA-Seabirds and the conservation of albatrosses and petrels. Participants included representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Falkland Islands/Malvinas Islands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Spain, UK, Uruguay, and USA. The workshop presented assessments and data on levels of seabird mortality which indicated that significant numbers of seabirds are caught annually in several longline fisheries in the region. Accordingly, several countries in South America stated in their reports to the 25th COFI that the assessments of their fisheries indicated a need for developing NPOA-Seabirds.
- In January 2004, BirdLife International sponsored a workshop in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, endorsed by the Fisheries Administration of Taiwan. Participants were from Japan, Korea, UK, New Zealand, Taiwan, US and the workshop focused on the Asian longline fleets and addressing seabird/fishery interactions.
- In August 2004, the Third International Conference on Albatrosses and Petrels was held in Uruguay. One of the sessions covered incidental seabird mortality and mitigation. In conjunction with this session, a workshop on “Quantifying seabird bycatch: A global perspective” was conducted. Workshop organizers presented information about a global seabird bycatch analysis that will synthesize national bycatch data to generate a global perspective of bycatch trends, the success of mitigation methods, and conservation priorities.