

***A Summary Report of Seabird Items from the 26th Meeting of the
FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI)***

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COFI-26's Agenda Item #4 called on FAO Members to report on 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*.

With respect to seabirds, eleven Members reported directly on various aspects of IPOA-Seabirds implementation. Reports ranged from NPOA-Seabirds implementation underway (Japan (submitted a revised NPOA-S to COFI), U.S., New Zealand), NPOAs near completion (Brazil, Chile, Namibia, South Africa), some IPOA-Seabirds activity (Australia, Canada, Peru, Uruguay). Two members indicated they had conducted assessments and observed little to no incidental catch of seabirds, thus a NPOA-Seabirds was not necessary (Mexico, El Salvador). One NGO (BirdLife International) reported on many albatross populations being near extinction as a result of mortalities in longline fisheries, and informed COFI of their new report "Regional Fisheries Management Organisations: Their duties and performance in reducing bycatch of albatrosses and other species." This report is of particular interest given the additional COFI agenda item of RFMO assessment and performance evaluation.

The US government hosted a side session on March 10, "IPOA- Seabirds: Best Practices for NPOA Development," attended by 24 participants. The purpose of the session was to inform participants about the status of NPOA development, encourage further development, and provide information on the essential elements and "best practices" of NPOA development. Mr. Wilfried Thiele, FAO Fisheries Department, indicated that FAO has contracted with Dr. Svein Lokkeborg to update the FAO Fisheries Circular No. 937, "Incidental Catch of Seabirds by Longline Fisheries: Worldwide Review and Technical Guidelines for Mitigation." The update will expand the volume to include information on other fisheries (trawl and gillnet) that are known to interact with seabirds. Session presentations were made by Mr. David Fischer, American Bird Conservancy; Ms. Kim Rivera, NOAA Fisheries Service; and Dr. Ben Sullivan, BirdLife International. Participant discussion ensued and several themes emerged, as follows: (1) political will is needed to convince policy makers and fishery managers of the importance of seabird conservation, (2) ways to trigger action and uptake of gear and operational changes by fishermen to avoid and reduce seabird incidental catch, and (3) effective outreach to fishermen.

A similar presentation took place at the 4th Meeting of the Regional Fisheries Bodies on March 14, 2005, entitled "IPOA-Seabirds: Implementation by RFMOs." Presenters were Ms. Kim Rivera, NOAA Fisheries Service, and Dr. Cleo Small, BirdLife International. Several recurring themes of COFI26 set the stage for this presentation, as follows: implementation of existing instruments, ecosystem-based approaches in fisheries management, and the roles and responsibilities of RFMOs. Just as FAO member states can develop NPOAs, RFMOs can develop plans of action to reduce the incidental catch of seabirds in fisheries.

For additional information on seabird incidental catch in fisheries from FAO and NOAA Fisheries, see:

FAO's site at http://www.fao.org/figis/servlet/static?dom=org&xml=ipoa_seabirds.xml

NOAA Fisheries Service website at
<http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds/national.htm>