

New approaches for better understanding seabird bycatch in tuna longline fisheries

Paper submitted to the 2015 IOTC 11th Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch meeting, Olhão, Portugal 7-11 September 2015

Ross M Wanless^{1,2} and Cleo Small³

¹ *Seabird Conservation Programme, BirdLife South Africa, PO Box 7119, Roggebaai, 8012, South Africa*

² *Percy FitzPatrick Institute, DST/NRF Centre of Excellence, University of Cape Town, Private Bag, Rondebosch, 7701, South Africa*

³ *BirdLife International Marine Programme, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK*

ABSTRACT

BirdLife International, through its local partner BirdLife South Africa, is implementing the seabird bycatch component of the FAO's GEF-funded Common Oceans Programme for tuna fisheries. Through this project, BirdLife proposes to hold a joint tuna RFMO meeting, under the banner of the Kobe Process, which would use a collaborative approach to undertake a global assessment of the impact of tuna RFMO seabird bycatch conservation measures. In addition, through the Common Ocean programme, BirdLife intends to support a collaborative approach to building capacity and expertise among national scientists in terms of analysis and reporting on bycatch matters to RFMOs, and to create a forum for these scientists to help develop analytical tools and implement these. Both processes are aimed at strengthening national capacity to manage and assess bycatch within national fleets, and to either harmonise approaches or identify new approaches to analysing and reporting on seabird bycatch across RFMOs.

Introduction

Accidental bycatch of seabirds has been recognised as a significant threat to many species and populations' survival, including by IOTC (IOTC 2012). As a result, all five tuna RFMOs have established conservation and management measures which require or recommend their longline vessels to use a combination of seabird bycatch mitigation measures in most areas overlapping with albatross and petrel distribution (CCSBT 2011, IATTC 2011, ICCAT 2011, IOTC 2012, WCPFC 2012). All of the tuna RFMOs have provisions for reviewing the effectiveness of their seabird conservation measures, including IOTC (due to be undertaken in 2015-2016). Such monitoring is important for ensuring that management interventions are having the desired effect, and to inform future management measure design and improve implementation. However, given that Resolution 12/06 was officially implemented from 1 July 2014, there has been too little time to gather sufficient data on the effectiveness of this measure.

Seabirds, particularly albatrosses and petrels, the group most vulnerable to tuna longline bycatch, are prodigious travellers, some able to circumnavigate the globe multiple times in a single year (BirdLife International 2004). These birds therefore encounter multiple fleets in multiple ocean basins. The IOTC's Seabird Executive Summary (IOTC-WPEB 2014) recognises the trans-oceanic habitat of some seabird species, which necessitates evaluation of the effectiveness and impacts of bycatch mitigation measures across ocean basins and through collaboration with other tuna RFMOs. That meeting also highlighted the value of ensuring linkages between the CCSBT seabird workshop (held in November 2014) and the process to develop the IOTC review (IOTC-WPEB 2014). There is, therefore, an identified need to undertake a global assessment of seabird bycatch data, to estimate the current (or recent past) bycatch rates, and to assess the effectiveness of the current tuna RFMO seabird bycatch conservation and management measures from a cumulative perspective. There is also a recognised value in establishing standardised techniques across tuna RFMOs for monitoring seabird bycatch rates.

Proposal for facilitating joint tuna RFMO analysis under the GEF Common Oceans Project

Two issues will, if addressed appropriately, facilitate joint tuna RFMO assessment of the effectiveness of current tuna RFMO seabird bycatch conservation measures. First is to establish an appropriate means by which detailed seabird bycatch data can be analysed in a collaborative context. While most tuna RFMOs have established requests or requirements for CPCs to submit data on bycatch to their respective Secretariats, gaps in bycatch data remains a common and substantial problem. In addition, data confidentiality issues hamper joint analyses, unless confidentiality requirements of RFMOs can be resolved. A collaborative workshop, like that used by RFMO stock assessment workshops, which supports analysis by national scientists, rather than giving data to a third party, would be ideal.

A second issue is that CPCs typically hold the datasets required to perform some analyses of bycatch data, but some lack either the time or the expertise to undertake thorough, rigorous analyses of their datasets.

BirdLife International, through its local partner BirdLife South Africa, is implementing the seabird bycatch component of the FAO's GEF-funded Common Oceans Programme for tuna fisheries. Through this project, BirdLife proposes to convene a joint tuna RFMO workshop, under the banner of the Kobe Process, to undertake a global collaborative assessment of the current (and recent) scale of seabird bycatch in tuna longline fisheries, and the impact of the current tuna RFMO seabird conservation and management measures. In addition, through the Common Ocean programme, BirdLife intends to support a process of capacity-building with those CPCs who would like it, to support a group of national scientists (from across tuna RFMOs) to build and enhance their skills in analysis of bycatch data, and to strengthen seabird bycatch reporting and management. We envisage this being implemented through stages, with regional workshops for national scientists, starting in 2016, leading to the global workshop, possibly in late-2017.

Undertaking a Kobe-type process would require the support of the five tuna RFMOs, both through providing expertise and data from within each Secretariat, and by encouraging the participation of CPCs with significant longline effort in areas where seabird conservation measures are in force. We request that IOTC join other tuna RFMOs to support, in principle, a Kobe Process seabird bycatch assessment workshop. We further request that IOTC recommend to relevant CPCs that they also take advantage of this opportunity for national capacity building, and participate in this Common Oceans initiative.

References

- BirdLife International. 2004. *Tracking Ocean Wanderers: the global distribution of albatrosses and petrels. Results from the Global Procellariiform Tracking Workshop, 1-5 September, 2003, Gordon's Bay, South Africa*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife.
- CCSBT 2011a. [CCSBT Recommendation to Mitigate the Impact on Ecologically Related Species of Fishing for Southern Bluefin Tuna 2011](#)
- IATTC 2011. Resolution to mitigate the impacts of fishing on seabirds. IATTC Resolution C-11-02. <https://www.iattc.org/PDFFiles2/Resolutions/C-11-02-Seabirds.pdf>
- ICCAT. 2009. Report of the 2009 inter-sessional meeting of the Sub-committee on Ecosystems, Recife, Brazil, June 8-12 2009. International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.
- ICCAT 2011 . Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT on Reducing Incidental By-Catch of Seabirds in ICCAT Longline Fisheries. Recommendation 11-09. <http://www.iccat.es/Documents/Recs/compendiopf-e/2011-09-e.pdf>
- ICCAT. 2014. Report of the 2014 inter-sessional meeting of the Sub-committee on Ecosystems, Olhão, Portugal, 1-5 September 2014. International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.
- IOTC 2012. Resolution 12/06 on reducing the incidental bycatch of seabirds in longline-fisheries. <http://www.iotc.org/cmm/resolution-1206-reducing-incident-bycatch-seabirds-longline-fisheries>
- IOTC–WPEB10 2014. Report of the 10th Session of the IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch. Yokohama, Japan, 27–30 October 2014. IOTC–2014–WPEB10–R[E]: 94 pp.
- WCPFC 2012. Conservation and Management Measure for Mitigating Impacts of Fishing on Seabirds. CMM 12-07. <https://www.wcpfc.int/doc/cmm-2012-07/conservation-and-management-measure-mitigating-impacts-fishing-seabirds>