

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

Paper for the 2nd meeting of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission's Working Party on Bycatch

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Introduction

The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) was concluded under the UNEP Convention on the conservation of Migratory Species (CMS). Albatrosses and Petrels belong to the Order Procellariiformes. Nearly half of the species in this Order are classified under one of the IUCN's threat criteria; one the highest ratios of any bird Order. There are several threats that cause the Order's condition, ranging from introduced alien species on breeding islands through to bycatch in fisheries. While the former threat can be addressed primarily through national action, mitigation of bycatch, especially on high seas, requires international co-operation. This latter was the primary motivation for the drafting and agreeing ACAP.

Following a number of informal meetings, two negotiation meetings were held to draft the text of the Agreement, in July 2000 in Hobart, Australia, and in Cape Town, South Africa in January-February 2001. The final text of the Agreement, including an Action Plan, was adopted at the Cape Town meeting (see www.acap.aq). The Agreement covers all albatross species occurring in the southern hemisphere as well as seven species of petrel. This list can be added to in the future as needed. All are believed to be affected adversely by bycatch. After the Cape Town meeting, the Agreement was opened to signature and ratification by Range States. In the case of ACAP, Range States include not only those with waters or territories within the breeding or feeding areas of albatrosses and petrels, but also those States whose fishing vessels operated within the range of the albatrosses and petrels covered by the Agreement.

The Agreement came into force in February 2004 and by July 2006, Argentina, Australia, Chile, Ecuador, France, New Zealand, Peru, South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom (including on behalf of its Overseas Territories in the South Atlantic) had become Parties by ratifying the Agreement. Ratification by other States, including particularly Brazil, is expected soon. The USA and BirdLife International have both been active as observers within ACAP.

The First Session of the Meeting of Parties was held in Hobart in November 2004. An Advisory Committee was established to provide scientific, technical and other advice to the Meeting of Parties. The first meeting of the Advisory Committee was held in July 2005, with the second in June 2006. Four Working Groups have been established under the Advisory Committee (on taxonomy; on status and trends, on breeding sites and on seabird bycatch).

Seabird Bycatch

As noted above, bycatch is the greatest threat to most species listed under ACAP. Two main forms of bycatch are known, through accidental hooking on long lines and through collision with trawl warps. Fisheries are managed both by national authorities and by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations. ACAP (and its Committees and Working Groups) recognise that it must work with and through fisheries managers if it is to be successful in reaching its objectives of improving the conservation status of the albatrosses and petrels. The Seabird Bycatch working Group has been charged with drawing up a strategy for ACAP Parties and range states to engage with RFMOs. As a first step, various Parties to ACAP have agreed to take a lead in considering appropriate interactions with each RFMO. UK (hopefully in association with other EU member states party to ACAP (France and Spain) have offered to take the lead initially with IOTC.

An indicative work plan for the Seabird Bycatch Working Group has been agreed, that will be discussed and refined within the bycatch strategy:

1. Collate available information on the foraging distribution of ACAP species and the degree of spatial and temporal overlap with fisheries;
2. Review and utilise available information on foraging distribution and seabird bycatch to assess the risk of fishing operations on ACAP species in fishing regions (e.g. RFMO areas of competence, national EEZs);
3. Review information on mitigation measures for fishing methods known to impact albatrosses and petrels. Initial work shall focus on pelagic longline methods;
4. Develop products to assist RFMOs and other relevant international and national bodies in reducing seabird bycatch. These could include:
 - observer programme designs including protocols for the collection of seabird bycatch data,
 - analytical methods for assessing seabird bycatch, and
 - best-practice mitigation measures;
5. Assist in the preparation, adoption and implementation of FAO NPOA-Seabirds, including the development of best-practice guidelines;
6. Develop materials and guidelines to assist ACAP representatives attending RFMO and other relevant meetings to maximise effective participation and consideration of issues relevant to ACAP.

Ultimately, it is hoped that the Agreement's engagements with RFMOs (and by Parties acting on behalf of and with the interests of ACAP) will encourage them to take the necessary actions to reduce at-sea mortality of ACAP species. These actions are likely to include the adopting of mitigation measures similar to those pioneered by CCAMLR in the Southern Ocean, but also be fully consistent with FAO's International Plan of Action for Seabirds.

The best source of further information on ACAP is its website: www.acap.aq.

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