

Minimum Data Requirements for Assessing and Managing Seabird Bycatch

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The purpose of this paper is to assist the IOTC to identify data fields that are not currently included in its Regional Observer Scheme, the collection of which may assist its understanding of fishery impacts on seabirds and in assessing the efficacy of the mitigation measures currently being used.

At the sixth meeting of its Advisory Committee, held in August 2011, ACAP identified the minimum data collection requirements considered necessary to assess fishery impacts on seabirds. It is pleasing to note that the IOTC Regional Observer Scheme currently seeks to collect all of the data identified by ACAP as essential for understanding fishery impact on seabirds.

ACAP also identified a number of additional data fields which, although not essential, would ideally be recorded as they would assist in improving our understanding of the factors influencing seabird bycatch. These additional data fields are:

- Regular seabird abundance estimates;
- The fate (dead/alive/injured) and number of birds (for each species) in each of these categories, and whether the bird was released alive, or discarded;

Seabird Abundance Estimates – collection of this data would allow observed seabird bycatch rates to be related to the number of birds present during setting operations. Detailed observations of seabird interactions with fishing gear can assist in understanding the circumstances that result in bycatch, and can be useful to identify the most effective mitigation measures to be used.

Detailed Information on Seabird Incidents - While it is noted that in Resolution 12/03 the catch of seabirds for vessels using longline and gillnet is included, it is assumed that it is only seabird mortality that is reported when a seabird is hauled on deck, and that this requirement does not include other interactions. The fate (dead/alive/injured) and number of birds (for each species) in each of these categories should be recorded for all observed seabird interactions. Also, it is unclear why the requirement to collect seabird data is optional when the CPC fully implements the observer program. This data should continue to be collected through observer programs, in whatever form they take, and when an observer program is not available, by being recorded in logbooks.