



INTRODUCTION

The Eighth Meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC8) to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) was held in Punta del Este, Uruguay from 15 – 19 September 2014. AC8 was preceded by the 2nd Meeting of ACAP's Population and Conservation Status Working Group (PaCSWG2) on 8-9 September 2014, and the Sixth Meeting of the Seabird Bycatch Working Group (SBWG6), from 10-12 September 2014. Reports of these meetings, and associated documents, can be downloaded from the ACAP website (www.acap.aq). The purpose of this paper is to provide a short summary of the meeting discussions and outcomes that are of relevance to the Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERSWG) of the CCSBT.

1. SUMMARY OF KEY OUTCOMES OF AC8 OF RELEVANCE TO THE ERSWG

1.1 Review of seabird bycatch mitigation measures for pelagic longline fisheries, and best practice advice

Amongst the important tasks undertaken at each meeting of the SBWG is the updating of the reviews and best practice (summary) advice relating to mitigation measures for longline and trawl fisheries. On the basis of the research presented and reviewed at these meetings, the Working Group ensures that these documents remain up to date, and the updated, or current, versions are provided as Annexes to the meeting report, and on the ACAP website. The latest review of seabird bycatch mitigation measures for pelagic longline fisheries is provided in a separate ERSWG11 paper (CCSBT-ERS/1503/13). The updated reviews and best practice advice on the mitigation of seabird bycatch are used to inform the updating of mitigation fact sheets, published jointly by ACAP and BirdLife International. The current versions of the mitigation fact sheets, which are also in Portuguese, Spanish, French, Japanese and Mandarin, can be downloaded from http://www.acap.aq/en/bycatch-mitigation/cat_view/128-english/392-bycatch-mitigation/320-bycatch-mitigation-fact-sheets.

There was some discussion regarding the current advice provided by ACAP on branchline weighting, especially as there have been further research developments, some of which are still underway, since ACAP's current advice was formulated. The

SBWG concluded that given the evidence currently available, the existing advice relating to branchline weighting would remain unchanged, but that it should be re-evaluated once further information becomes available. In order to facilitate this process the SBWG formulated a three-step research plan that comprises the following steps: 1) statistical analysis of existing sink rate data to categorise various weighting configurations according to their sink rates; 2) review of the papers underpinning the existing ACAP advice, including taking account of the criteria for best practice and the type of seabird assemblages within which the previous studies were conducted; and 3) carrying out further collaborative field research on the relationship between sink rate configurations, identified in step 1, and resulting seabird mortalities and/ or seabird attack rates.

The SBWG noted that in addition to effects on seabird behaviour and bycatch rates, branch line weighting studies should include evaluations that take account of the other criteria for determining best practice, including among other things, the effects of line weighting on catch rates of target species and evaluation of the relative safety and practicality of alternative line weighting configurations, when compared to existing best practice line weighting configurations.

The SBWG also endorsed a proposal for comprehensive testing of line weighting configurations and devices to provide robust advice on the potential for different weighting configurations to cause fly-back injuries, and to identify configurations and handling practices for ACAP recommended branch line weighting configurations that optimises safety.

It was noted, that there are a number of novel or emerging bycatch mitigation technologies that are being considered or tested, such as devices that release or protect baited hooks at depths beyond the reach of seabirds, sliding weights, and aspects of vessel design. The SBWG encouraged further research in this area and for the outputs of this research to be used to inform ACAP's reviews of bycatch mitigation measures and best practice advice pertaining to pelagic longline and other fisheries.

1.2 Bycatch data reporting, analyses and monitoring

For ACAP to review and monitor levels and trends of bycatch ACAP-listed species in relevant fisheries, a web-based reporting system has been developed for the capture and use of fisheries and bycatch data from Parties and collaborating Range States. The question of whether Parties should analyse their own bycatch and associated data and routinely submit the results to ACAP, or whether the raw or aggregated data should be sent to ACAP for analyses was discussed. It was recommended that the first step in this process should be to define more clearly the bycatch indicators that would be used by ACAP to measure and track bycatch of ACAP species. Once these indicators are defined, the data, methodological approaches to estimating bycatch, and reporting requirements can be determined. It was agreed that the primary indicator measures should be the total number of seabirds caught per year of ACAP species (by species where possible), and their bycatch rate, across each of the fisheries of Parties. The SBWG also encouraged the cooperation between Parties to conduct estimates at regional levels, especially when the distributions of fisheries overlap jurisdictions. It was envisaged that each Party would use their own domestic fisheries

data to provide estimates to ACAP of these measures for each of their fishing fleets. The Working Group identified that a range of methodological approaches could be used by Parties to estimate these figures, and appropriate methodologies would vary according to data availability. The frequency of estimates, the accuracy of estimates, the ability to back cast estimates to the establishment of ACAP, and the ability to distinguish between species in bycatch were all recognised as key considerations. An intersessional group was established to further define the detail of the indicator measures and review the range of methodologies currently used by Parties, in order to establish guidelines and advice on suitable methodologies. The intersessional group will report back to the next meeting of the SBWG with the aim of establishing both the indicator measures of preference and the reporting requirements of Parties in order to measure progress against them.

1.3 Electronic monitoring

The SBWG discussed the use of electronic monitoring as a means of complementing scientific observer programmes for the purposes of bycatch assessments and monitoring. It was noted that the concept of e-monitoring encompasses more than simple video monitoring, and that while the technology has great potential as a tool for monitoring, there are also challenges and limitations. ACAP's Advisory Committee supported a proposal for an intersessional investigation of the benefits and limitations of e-monitoring concerning seabird bycatch and mitigation, and through this process the development of best practice guidelines.

1.4 FAO NPOA – Seabirds

On the basis of discussions at SBWG6, the Advisory Committee supported a recommendation for the SBWG to conduct a comprehensive review of the status and implementation of NPOA-Seabirds adopted by ACAP Parties and other Range States. This review will consider, *inter alia*, the extent to which these plans conform to the latest (2009) FAO best practice technical guidelines for reducing incidental catch of seabirds in capture fisheries, and will build on previous work in this area.

1.5 Hook removal guide

The ACAP hook removal guide has been finalised and is now available on the ACAP website along with other conservation guidelines (<http://www.acap.aq/resources/acap-conservation-guidelines>). Files for commercial quality printing in A3 and A4 format are also available from the Secretariat. French, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, Japanese and Chinese versions of the guide will all be available by May this year.

1.6 Photo identification guide for bycaught seabirds

The ACAP Photo ID guide for bycaught seabirds, drafted with the help of the Japanese National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries, is close to completion, and is awaiting further graphic design work. The ID guide should be available from the ACAP website by early 2015 and will also be translated into Spanish and French as well as other languages as relevant for RFMO fishing fleets.

The guide includes protocols for the collection of feathers from bycaught birds that can be used for genetic analysis and determining the provenance of bycaught individuals.

This aspect of the ID guide was discussed in more details in ACAP's Population and Conservation Status Working Group (PaCSWG), especially in the context of harmonising protocols for biological sampling in general, as well as the use of those samples. The PaCSWG noted that it is essential to ensure there is a well-coordinated framework for transportation, storage and analysis of samples. Determining the provenance of bycaught birds through the genetic analysis would also require samples of genetic data from birds at breeding colonies. An ad-hoc working group of the PaCSWG will be set up to progress this work intersessionally.