Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

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ACAP Position Statement for the 33rd Annual Meeting of the CCSBT and 21st Meeting of the Compliance Committee

Our position

ACAP calls on CCSBT to strengthen its conservation efforts for Ecologically Related Species of albatrosses and petrels, and other seabirds.

ACAP calls on CCSBT to adopt and implement a standalone CCSBT Resolution that:

- incorporates ACAP 2026 Summary Best Practice Advice for Reducing the Impact of Pelagic Longline Fisheries on Seabirds
- incorporates ACAP Guidelines to measure the sink rates of baited hooks in pelagic longline fisheries using Time-Depth Recorders
- increases the minimum level of observer coverage (human and/or electronic) across SBT fishing fleets to an interim level of 20%
- establishes a timeframe towards achieving 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) across SBT fishing fleets.

ACAP calls on CCSBT to ensure robust and transparent compliance across SBT fishing fleets with the requirements of the Resolution to Align CCSBT's Ecologically Related Species measures with those of other tuna RFMOs:

- by taking concrete steps that address long-standing, non-compliance on a fleet-by-fleet basis with existing obligations to use two out of three seabird bycatch mitigation measures
- by taking concrete steps to implement and report annually on management responses taken concerning non-compliance.

ACAP calls on CCSBT to fully implement the Actions agreed to under CCSBT's Multi-year Seabird Strategy concerning high-risk areas by:

- establishing a robust definition of high-risk areas
- identifying high-risk areas and developing tailored measures at addressing risks to seabirds in these areas (see below).
- improving procedures and protocols to ensure that seabird interactions are resolved to species level
- as by taking concrete steps to increase the scope and range of seabird bycatch mitigation measures in high-risk areas.

Management Action for high-risk areas

The outcomes of the CCSBT Spatially Explicit Fisheries Risk Assessment (SEFRA) model highlight the importance of CCSBT moving directly to developing area-based measures.

The SEFRA clearly demonstrates that CCSBT fisheries alone are a significant conservation threat to seabirds, especially threatened albatrosses and petrel species. The risks posed by pelagic longline fishing by CCSBT Members to these species is recognised by ERSWG which has identified key areas where management actions should be targeted.

ACAP urges that prompt and effective management action be taken in these high-risk areas to reduce the risk of further population declines for species already identified as threatened with extinction and that are in decline.

ACAP urges CCSBT to consider the full range of management actions available to address this conservation crisis including, but not limited to:

- Adopting the 3/3 recommended ACAP Best Practice Measures, or hook-shielding devices as a standalone alternative.
- Requiring pre-nomination by vessels intending to fish for SBT in identified high-risk areas.
- Requiring all such nominated SBT fishing vessels to either carry observers onboard or to install operational EM systems to improve monitoring of fishing operations, recording of interactions with seabirds, and the effective implementation of the seabird mitigation measures.
- Requiring Members to delineate high-risk areas within Members' VMS monitoring and identification systems.
- Requiring all fishing vessels that wish to pass through but not conduct fishing operations in high-risk areas to stow all fishing gear onboard while transiting these areas, and to advise their management authorities prior to and after completing the transit of any high-risk area.
- Requiring Members to identify and report annually on what compliance actions have been taken for any of their fishing vessels that enter a high-risk area that has not pre-nominated to fish in such areas.
- Where only 2/3 mitigation measures are used, requiring fishing vessels to immediately adopt 3/3 mitigation measures (or hook-shielding devices) where three or more incidental mortalities of high-priority species occur, recognising that if species identification is not achieved then this management action will apply if three or more seabirds are bycaught. Requiring such vessels to continue to adopt 3/3 mitigation measures for the remainder of the fishing season when fishing occurs in any high-risk area.
- Requiring night setting to be completed entirely during the night, recognising that setting longlines across night and day does not represent night setting: either when setting commences at night and finishes after the nautical dawn, or when setting commences prior to the nautical dusk and continues into the night.
- Requiring a fishing vessel to cease fishing in any high-risk area for the remainder of the fishing season if, after adopting 3/3 mitigation measures, a further three or more incidental mortalities of high-priority species occur, recognising that if species identification is not achieved then this management action will apply if a further three or more seabirds are bycaught.

ACAP recognises that CCSBT defers to ICCAT, IOTC and WCPFC regarding the development of conservation and management measures (CMMs). ACAP therefore urges Members to develop and agree to the management actions for high-risk areas and then advocate collectively for their immediate incorporation in the relevant CMMs.

Basis for our position

ACAP's Best Practice Advice and Guidelines

- reflect the best available scientific evidence on ways to avoid or minimise the incidental catch of seabirds during fishing operations
- are developed and refined from the results of extensive, robust scientific research on the technologies and techniques that are necessary to avoid or minimise the significant threat posed by fishing gears to seabirds
- are assessed against rigorous criteria to determine whether a particular technology or technique can be considered best practice to reduce the incidental mortality of albatrosses and petrels in fishing operations.

ACAP Best Practice Advice assessment criteria

1. Individual fishing technologies and techniques should be selected from those shown by experimental research to significantly (in the statistical context) reduce the rate of seabird incidental mortality to the lowest achievable levels (determined by either a direct reduction in seabird mortality or by reduction in seabird attack rates, as a proxy).
2. Fishing technologies and techniques, or a combination thereof, should have clear and proven specifications and minimum performance standards for their deployment and use.
3. Fishing technologies and techniques should be demonstrated to be practical, cost effective and widely available.
4. Fishing technologies and techniques should, to the extent practicable, maintain catch rates of target species.
5. Fishing technologies and techniques should, to the extent practicable, not increase the bycatch of other taxa.
6. Minimum performance standards and methods of ensuring compliance should be provided for fishing technologies and techniques and clearly specified in fishery regulations.

CCSBT's Multi-Year Strategy

The CCSBT's Multi-year Seabird Strategy (updated at the Thirty-First Annual Meeting, 2024) commits CCSBT Members to achieving five specific objectives:

1. To reduce the level of impact of seabird bycatch by SBT fishing operations on seabird populations.
2. To ensure the collection of timely, reliable, representative data to support accurate regular estimations of total seabird mortality in SBT fisheries and its impact on seabird populations.
3. To develop and refine, in collaboration with industry and ACAP, practical, cost-effective and safe seabird bycatch mitigation technologies and techniques.
4. To develop and refine compliance approaches to ensure fleet-wide compliance with seabird bycatch mitigation measures required while conducting fishing for SBT.

5. To enhance education and outreach programs highlighting the importance of mitigating seabird interactions while fishing, and advocating effective implementation of mitigation measures.

ACAP is concerned about the progress within CCSBT in advancing and completing the Actions against each Objective within the agreed timelines.

Commitment

ACAP is committed to ongoing cooperation with CCSBT

- we will continue to advocate for strengthened conservation and protection of albatrosses and petrels, and other seabirds
- our engagement in CCSBT forums shall be facilitative in nature
- we will continue to support efforts to minimise the incidental bycatch of albatrosses and petrels in areas where fishing for SBT occurs under the governance of CCSBT.

Context

The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) is an international governmental organisation that aims to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels.

Of the 13 ACAP Parties, five are also CCSBT Members (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain and France (via the European Union)).

We encourage international cooperative action to conserve and protect seabirds by all States and Fishing Entities whose fishing activities cause the incidental bycatch of seabirds.

Our focus is on the most threatened group of seabirds globally: all 22 species of albatross, as well as an additional nine species of petrels listed in Annex 1 to ACAP. All these species require urgent conservation action to address the threats at-sea and on land to their long-term survival in nature.

Of the 25 species of albatrosses and large petrels that overlap in distribution with CCSBT fisheries, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) currently lists:

- one as Critically Endangered (CR)
- eight as Endangered (EN)
- eight as Vulnerable (VU)
- five as Near Threatened (NT)
- three as Least Concern (LC)

Of additional concern is that seven of the nine ACAP High Priority Populations breed and forage in areas where CCSBT fishing occurs. Each of these High Priority Populations represent more than 10% of a species' global population; all are declining at more than 3% per year over a 20-year period; and incidental mortality in fisheries is a major underlying cause of the population declines.

For more information contact

Jonathon Barrington, ACAP Executive Secretary
Secretariat@acap.aq | www,acap.aq