

 <p data-bbox="229 542 469 582">Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels</p>	<p data-bbox="587 250 1385 344">Thirteenth Meeting of the Advisory Committee <i>Edinburgh, United Kingdom, 22 – 26 May 2023</i></p> <p data-bbox="536 421 1347 515">The Tasman Sea as a candidate High Seas Marine Protected Area</p> <p data-bbox="769 604 1120 640"><i>BirdLife International</i></p>
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SUMMARY

The Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction has recently agreed the “High Seas Treaty”. This Treaty provides the framework to allow the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) on the High Seas. Several priority sites have been identified as potential candidates for proposed High Seas MPAs. Some of the priority sites overlap with important habitat for albatrosses and petrels and are relevant to the discussions at the ACAP Working Groups and Advisory Committee. BirdLife welcomes input on the development of plans toward promoting the Tasman Sea as a potential High Seas MPA.

1. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS ON THE HIGH SEAS

1.1 Introduction

The long-term benefits to marine ecosystems from the establishment, and effective management, of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are well known. The recent agreement of the “High Seas Treaty” provides a long-awaited instrument through which MPAs can be designated on the High Seas, once formal adoption and implementation has been completed.

Several priority sites have been identified as potential candidates for proposed High Seas MPAs. BirdLife International, in collaboration with the High Seas Alliance, is supporting the coordination of information and stakeholders toward building a High Seas MPA proposal for the Tasman Sea.

1.2. Tasman Sea: A candidate High Seas MPA

The subtropical convergence and combination of underwater features makes the Tasman Sea an area of globally high primary productivity, which in turn attracts a great abundance and variety of marine life. Already internationally recognised as an Ecologically or Biologically Significant Area (EBSA), it contains five Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) and is critical habitat and migratory routes for hundreds of species of marine animals.

1.2.1. Habitat

The topographical features in the waters between Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are unique and varied. There are seamount summits at depths as shallow as 200m, while the Lord Howe Rise reaches the surface at the Middleton and Elizabeth Reefs and Lord Howe Island – the three most southerly coral reefs on Earth. There are guyots, canyons, ridges, and rocky outcrops, and soft sediments of the seabed. In the deeper waters of the South Tasman Sea one seamount towers up to within 25m of the surface from a base 4,500m down. These features provide a diversity of habitat for a rich assemblage of marine species.

1.2.2. Marine biodiversity

The Tasman Sea boasts some of the highest seabird densities in the world. Fourteen of the albatrosses and six of the petrel species listed under ACAP use the waters of the Tasman and many colonies are proximal to the area, which is an important foraging site during the breeding cycle. It is an important migratory pathway for humpback & blue whales and as many as 66 shark species have been observed there. Five of the seven sea turtle species have been observed in the Tasman Sea – Green, Leatherback, Hawksbill, Loggerhead, and Olive Ridley – all of which are threatened with extinction.

2.1. Main threats

2.1.1 Fishing

The high levels of productivity associated with these subtropical convergence zones also make the Tasman Sea a desirable fishing site for valuable target fish species, including Southern Bluefin Tuna. Fisheries operating in the Tasman Sea that target Southern Bluefin Tuna have reported some of the highest bycatch rates in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) convention areas.

The species most frequently killed as bycatch include the Antipodean Albatross, Black-browed Albatross, Buller's, and Shy Albatrosses. Capture rates of breeding birds are concentrated between September and April during the egg-laying and chick-rearing period.

2.1.2. Climate

The average sea surface temperatures (SST) in the Tasman Sea are rising at three times the average rate of warming in the world's oceans (average SST is + 2°C over the past 60 years). There are increasing episodic heatwave events associated with the poleward shift of the East Australian Current, which is diverted towards the east at about 35°S forming the Tasman Front which brings warm water to Lord Howe Island and Aotearoa NZ. The resulting eddies can lead to rapid changes in SST, as much as 7°C in 24 hours have been recorded. This creates a dynamic upwelling zone and high productivity in the region.

3.1 Next steps

BirdLife International is collating and building the knowledge base and engaging with stakeholders, to develop a proposal for the Tasman Sea as a High Seas MPA that could be taken forward once the new High Seas Treaty has been ratified. We invite comments and input from the ACAP Working Group members and Advisory Committee.

ACAP Listed species that utilise the Tasman Sea

Taxa	Common name	Species	IUCN Redlist
Albatrosses	Antipodean & Gibson's Albatross	<i>Diomedea antipodensis</i>	EN
	Black browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>	LC
	Campbell Albatross	<i>Thalassarche impavida</i>	VU
	Chatham albatross	<i>Thalassarche eremita</i>	VU
	Grey-headed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i>	EN
	Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche carteri</i>	EN
	Light-mantled Sooty Albatross	<i>Phoebetria palpebrata</i>	NT
	Buller's Albatross	<i>Thalassarche bulleri</i>	NT
	Northern Royal Albatross	<i>Diomedea sanfordi</i>	EN
	Salvin's Albatross	<i>Thalassarche salvini</i>	VU
	Shy Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	NT
	Southern Royal albatross	<i>Diomedea epomophora</i>	VU
	Wandering Albatross	<i>Diomedea exulans</i>	VU
	White-capped albatross	<i>Thalassarche steadi</i>	NT
Petrels	Black Petrel	<i>Procellaria parkinsoni</i>	VU
	Westland Petrel	<i>Procellaria westlandica</i>	VU
	White chinned Petrel	<i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>	LC
	Southern giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	LC
	Northern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	LC
Non- ACAP Species			
	Bulwer's petrel	<i>Bulweria bulwerii</i>	LC
	Black-winged Petrel	<i>Pterodroma nigripennis</i>	LC
	Cook's petrel	<i>Pterodroma cookii</i>	VU
	Gould's petrel	<i>Pterodroma leucoptera</i>	LC
	Great winged (grey-faced) petrel	<i>Pterodroma macroptera</i>	LC
	Soft-plumaged petrel	<i>Pterodroma mollis</i>	LC
	Providence petrel	<i>Pterodroma solandri</i>	VU
	White-headed petrel	<i>Pterodroma lessonii</i>	LC
	Common diving petrel	<i>Pelecanoides georgicus</i>	LC
	Black-bellied storm petrel	<i>Fregetta tropica</i>	LC
	Wilson's storm petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	LC
	Whenua Hou diving petrel/ kuaka	<i>Pelecanoides georgicus whenuahouensis</i>	CR
	Buller's shearwater / rako	<i>Ardenna bulleri</i>	VU

	Little shearwater	<i>Puffinus assimilis</i>	LC
	Short-tailed shearwater	<i>Ardenna tenuirostris</i>	LC
	Antarctic Prion	<i>Pachyptila desolata</i>	LC
	Fairy Prion	<i>Pachyptila turtur</i>	LC
	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	LC
	Australasian gannet	<i>Morus serrator</i>	LC
	Hoiho/Yellow-eyed penguin	<i>Megadyptes antipodes</i>	EN
	Little blue penguin	<i>Eudyptula minor</i>	LC