



Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

Third Meeting of Advisory Committee

Valdivia, Chile, 19 – 22 June 2007

Expert Consultation for International Plan of Action-Seabirds

Author:

Birdlife International

AC3 Inf 25 Rev 1
Agenda Item No.6



Expert Consultation for International Plan of Action-Seabirds

BirdLife International invite the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels to consider becoming an official partner and contribute to funding an Expert Consultation held by the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - to develop 'best practice' guidelines for National Plan of Action Seabirds (NPOA-Seabirds). ACAP are requested to consider providing US\$10,000 out of an estimated US\$50-60,000 to ensure the consultation goes ahead in early to mid 2008. Such guidelines would provide clear guidance under the International Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (IPOA-Seabirds).

This initiative was recently supported by the 27th meeting of the UN FAO Committee of Fisheries (COFI, March 2007). This included support by several ACAP Parties; Australia, Chile and New Zealand and also by signatories Brazil and the USA, amongst others. Under Matters Arising that require the attention of the FAO Council for information/decision (Agenda Item 4; Progress in the Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, related International Plans of Action and Strategy, and Agenda Item 10 Implementing the ecosystem approach to fisheries, including deep-sea fisheries, marine debris and lost and abandoned gear); respectively, in the Report of the Twenty-Seventh Session of the Committee on Fisheries (Rome, 5-9 March 2007), the Committee:

Agreed that, depending on cost and related considerations, best practice technical guidelines to support the elaboration of NPOAs for seabirds would be developed through continuing joint work between FAO and relevant bodies and organizations or an expert consultation (para. 14).

Agreed that FAO should, in cooperation with relevant bodies, develop best practice guidelines to assist countries and RFMOs in implementation of the IPOA-seabirds and that the best practice guidelines should be extended to other relevant fishing gears

This later text is particularly important as it provides the scope for the guidelines to feed into RFMO processes and provides a clear mandate to address non-longline fisheries (e.g. trawl and gill-net fishing) in the guidelines.

In the body of the report (Agenda Item 10, Implementing the ecosystem approach to fisheries, including deep-sea fisheries, marine debris and lost and abandoned gear, para 80) the role of ACAP was recognised by the Committee as important to the success of the Consultation.

Bycatch was recognized by COFI as being a serious concern in many fisheries. It was agreed that FAO should, in cooperation with relevant bodies, develop best practice guidelines to assist countries and RFMOs in implementation of the IPOA-seabirds and that the best practice guidelines should be extended to other relevant fishing gears. Many Members expressed the view that the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) and BirdLife International were the most relevant bodies in that context.

Background

In May 2006, the BirdLife Global Seabird Programme had a meeting with the FAO Department of Fisheries to discuss improving the implementation of the IPOA-Seabirds. It was agreed that at the COFI meeting in March 2007, BirdLife would seek the support of FAO Member States for a FAO Expert Consultation to develop detailed 'best practice' guidelines for the development of NPOA-Seabirds.

The IPOA-Seabirds contains a good overview of the steps taken to conduct an assessment of the need for an NPOA-Seabirds, and brief technical guidelines as to what a plan should include. However, the standard and scope of plans adopted so far vary considerably.

At the second meeting of the Advisory Committee it was noted (5.1.11) *Discussion were also held regarding a more robust and uniform development of NPOA-Seabirds, which could potentially include development of FAO best practice guidelines. BirdLife will continue to work with FAO on this issue and keep ACAP informed of progress and opportunities.*

In addition, at the October 2006 meeting of Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), the initiative received the support of the Scientific Committee who 'encouraged Members to support a BirdLife International initiative at COFI-27 to advance best-practice guidelines for the development and implementation of NPOA-Seabirds'.

Justification

BirdLife considers that the case for best practice guidelines at this time is urgent and predicated on two key issues: firstly the accelerating decline of albatross population status around the world; secondly the publication in recent months of a number of new NPOA-Seabirds, which makes it timely to distil lessons from which future plans can benefit and to assist contracting parties to develop them.

The albatross family *Diomedidae* is becoming threatened faster than any other family of birds; 19 of the 21 species of albatross are now globally threatened with extinction,

an increase from 7 species in 1994. The primary many albatross species face is bycatch in longline and trawl fisheries. To help address this problem, in 1999 the IPOA-Seabirds was adopted by FAO COFI. Given that the IPOA-Seabirds calls for States to 'start the implementation of the NPOA-Seabirds no later than the COFI Session in 2001', and currently only seven plans have been officially adopted, the implementation of IPOA-Seabirds can at best be described as slow. However, it is encouraging that in the past 12-18 months there has been considerable progress in the development of NPOA-Seabirds with several in advanced draft stage or awaiting government endorsement, (e.g. Australia, Chile, South Africa) and others currently being drafted (e.g. Argentina). Recent data from several trawl fisheries in the Southern Ocean have also highlighted the need to address seabird bycatch in non-longline fisheries, which would be one of the important outcomes of the 'best practice' guidelines.

Best practice guidelines for NPOA-Seabirds was discussed at the first meeting of the ACAP Seabird Bycatch Working Group (Valdivia, June 17-18, 2007), further indicating ACAP's important role in engaging key stakeholders to greatly improve the delivery of IPOA-Seabirds by supporting and funding The Fisheries and Aquaculture Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Expert Consultation to develop 'best practice' guidelines for NPOA-Seabirds.