



Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

Third Meeting of the Parties

Bergen, Norway, 27 April – 1 May 2009

**Title: Development of a Framework to Guide ACAP in
Prioritising Management Action**

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Development of a Framework to Guide ACAP in Prioritising Management Actions

Executive Summary

This paper describes the development of a framework to help ACAP and its Parties to systematically and consistently set priorities for actions to address threats to albatrosses and petrels.

Priority-setting is both necessary and beneficial. It is necessary because the Agreement is constrained by limited funding and resources. It is also beneficial because of the complexity and diversity of management actions required to achieve a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels.

At AC4, the Advisory Committee noted that there was considerable merit in developing a priority-setting framework to help Parties to more effectively implement the Agreement. In particular, through:

- the development of an effective work plan that clearly identifies the most important and urgent tasks, and brings together different types of work, such as capacity building, research, engagement with Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and performance indicators;
- improving the alignment of the work of the Advisory Committee and its Working Groups, Parties and the Meeting of the Parties, including by providing a focus for reporting on progress to the Advisory Committee and to the Meeting of the Parties;
- highlighting important gaps in data and knowledge; and
- assisting external organisations such as NGOs in prioritising actions to conserve seabirds and in gaining funding for the implementation of ACAP priorities.

The Committee accepted an offer by New Zealand to continue to develop a possible framework and to present a progress report to MoP3. The proposed framework uses a points-scoring methodology to determine priority management actions, taking into account vulnerability, severity of threat and likelihood of success of taking management actions. The framework is currently being tested with a sample of species, threats and populations. A revision to this paper will be prepared to provide the latest information about the outcomes of the proposed approach (when applied to sample species), including any necessary refinements or limitations identified.

The third session of the Meeting of the Parties is requested to:

- **note** the benefits of developing a framework to prioritise management actions to address threats to albatrosses and petrels;
- **note** that good progress has been made in the development of a prioritisation framework;
- **agree** that the Advisory Committee should continue to develop and test the prioritisation framework; and
- **note** that such a framework, once fully tested, will guide the work of ACAP and can be used by Parties when considering management action, data

collection, research programmes, capacity building initiatives and reporting requirements.

Objective

This paper describes the development of a framework to help ACAP and its Parties to systematically and consistently set priorities for actions to address threats to albatrosses and petrels.

Rationale

The objective of the Agreement is to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels. Under the Agreement, Parties are required to take measures, both individually and together, to achieve this objective, including those measures set out in Articles III to VI and in Annex 2 of the Agreement.

Priority-setting is essential because the Agreement is constrained by limited funding, expertise, and other resources. It is also beneficial because of the complexity and diversity of management actions required to achieve a favourable conservation status for the species of albatrosses and petrels listed on Annex 1.

Developing a priority-setting framework to guide decision-making by ACAP and its Parties will help to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently. Specifically, a priority-setting framework will greatly assist Parties in meeting their obligations under the Agreement, including to:

1. identify priority conservation measures at breeding sites and in global fisheries (Article III);
2. identify priority research areas relating to effective conservation of albatrosses and petrels (Article III);
3. provide guidance on priorities for conservation actions that may require capacity building initiatives (Article IV);
4. develop one element of a system for collecting and analysing data and exchanging information (Article V);
5. guide the development of an Action Plan to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels (Article VI);
6. improve the provision of advice and information to the Meeting of the Parties and, through the Secretariat, to the Parties (Article IX);
7. guide recommendations to the Meeting of the Parties concerning the Action Plan, implementation of the Agreement and further research to be conducted (Article IX);
8. report to each Meeting of the Parties on the implementation of the Agreement (Article IX);
9. assist in the development of a system of indicators to measure the collective success of the Parties to the Agreement in addressing the objective of the Agreement (Article IX);
10. assist the Secretariat in the promotion and co-ordination of activities, and liaising with non-Party range States, international and national organisations (Article X); and
11. guide Parties in the development and implementation of conservation strategies for particular species or groups of species of albatrosses and petrels (Annex 2).

More generally, a prioritisation framework will assist in the development of an effective work plan for the Advisory Committee that clearly identifies the most important and urgent tasks, and brings together different types of work, such as capacity building, research, engagement with RFMOs and performance indicators.

The framework will also improve the efficiency of ACAP, through better alignment of the Advisory Committee and its Working Groups, Parties and the Meeting of the Parties. Finally, it will also assist external organisations such as NGOs to contribute towards the objectives of ACAP, such as through supporting the rationale for funding applications to deliver ACAP priorities.

Research approach to developing a priority-setting framework

How to set priorities for management actions relating to conservation problems is a common dilemma faced by conservation practitioners. Various methods have been developed that follow three general styles (Mace et al. 2007):

1. rule-based methods. These have measurable rules to determine levels of risk. If explicit thresholds are triggered relating to one of the rules, the species moves to a different risk category. An example is the IUCN system;
2. points-scoring methods. These assign points to a number of different attributes that are assumed to have a bearing on conservation risk, which together will determine their priority. An example is the Partners in Flight system for prioritising conservation of non-game birds in the USA; and
3. qualitative judgement methods. Priorities are determined by expert opinion, without reference to formal guidance mechanisms. An example is the NatureServe system, developed by The Nature Conservancy to determine susceptibility of species or ecological communities.

The approach being developed for the ACAP prioritisation framework uses a points-scoring methodology. Points are assigned to variables relating to the following three key elements of the prioritisation framework:

- the vulnerability of a particular seabird population;
- the severity of threat faced by that population; and
- the benefits of taking management action, including its likelihood of success.

The scores of these three areas are combined to give a total points score for a particular management action for a particular population. In this way, conservation actions can be ranked by priority and compared with all other potential management actions. It is likely that similarly scoring management actions would then be grouped together, with each group given a label such as “highest priority”.

Recent progress

Two papers were developed and presented to the fourth meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC4) relating to priority-setting:

- AC4 Doc 15, by New Zealand, which set out principles for prioritising management action and a proposed methodology at a species level; and

- AC4 Doc 48, by ACAP officials, which sought to develop a methodology for identifying conservation issues at a population or species level that needed to be addressed as a high priority.

Both papers were considered at the Status and Trends and the Breeding Sites Working Group meetings, in the days prior to AC4. It was agreed that both papers contained valuable ideas and it was clear that these ideas needed to be brought together. To that end, a small group convened by New Zealand met during the Advisory Committee meeting to develop a prioritisation framework for both land- and sea-based threats that brought together the best components of each paper. The framework also sought to identify data gaps that would benefit most from being addressed.

The Advisory Committee supported ongoing work in this area and gratefully accepted the offer from New Zealand to continue to lead the process and many Parties offered to provide assistance to the process. The Advisory Committee also asked that a paper should be developed for presentation to the next session of the Meeting of Parties (MOP3) in April 2009.

Since AC4, development of the prioritisation framework has progressed to the point where the methodology is currently being tested using a small number of samples of species and threats. Once this initial testing is complete, the weighting criteria will be verified using expert opinion, and a larger-scale data collection and analysis of results will be undertaken. The key steps, including timelines for completion, are as follows:

| Process | Timeline |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Describing the key elements of the framework and how they will interact, and developing a data collection form | Completed |
| Populating the form with trial data | In progress |
| Developing an initial view on the criteria for weighting, scoring and ranking management priorities | In progress |
| Refine approach and weighting, drawing on trial data | March - June 2009 |
| Gather full dataset and populate spreadsheet | June 2009 onwards |
| Validate weighting criteria and priorities with expert opinion | late 2009 |
| Present paper to AC5 seeking endorsement | Early 2010, subject to timing of AC5 |