



Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels
Interim Secretariat provided by the Australian Government

First Meeting of Advisory Committee
Hobart, Australia, 20 – 22 July 2005

Agenda Item No .10
ACAP/AC1/Doc.12
Chair, Taxonomy Working Group

**Towards a Review of the Taxonomy of Albatrosses
and Petrels**

TOWARDS A REVIEW OF THE TAXONOMY OF ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS

1. Article IX 6 (b) of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) requires the Advisory Committee to “endorse a standard reference text listing the taxonomy and maintain a listing of taxonomic synonyms for all species covered by the Agreement”. This reflects the current state of flux in the taxonomy of Procellariiformes and in particular of albatrosses.
2. Resolution 1.5 of the First Session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP1) to ACAP provides for the establishment by the Advisory Committee of a Working Group on the taxonomy of albatross and petrel species covered by the Agreement.
3. The objective of this Working Group is to establish a transparent, defensible and highly consultative taxonomic listing process. The informal Scientific Meeting which preceded MOP1 stated that “...given the importance that species lists have upon conservation policy and scientific communication, taxonomic decisions must be based on robust and defensible criteria. It is important to resolve differences in a scientific and transparent manner with appropriate use of peer-reviewed publications” (ACAP/MOP1/Doc15, paragraph 4.3).
4. The recommendation of the informal Scientific Meeting that Michael Double (Australia) should chair the Working Group, was agreed. The Terms of Reference of the Taxonomy Working Group specifying the work program, the membership (as at July 2005), and the timetable for progress are provided in Attachment 1.

Progress to Date

5. February 2005 – The Chair of the Taxonomy Working Group invited scientists currently active in the field of procellariiforme taxonomy to be members of the Working Group. Currently (July 2005) the members of the Working Group (WG) are Michael Double (Australia; Chair), Mike Brooke (United Kingdom), Mark Tasker (United Kingdom), Peter Ryan (South Africa) and Geoff Chambers (New Zealand).
6. April 2005 – Members agreed upon the Terms of Reference for the WG (Attachment 1).
7. April 2005 – An internet web site was launched to facilitate and manage interactions between WG members through discussion forums. All submissions are automatically circulated to all members of the Working Group and archived simultaneously.
8. April 2005 – A bibliographic database of over 100 scientific papers pertinent to procellariiforme taxonomy was added to the Taxonomy WG web site. All entries are linked to portable document format (pdf) files thus providing WG members with instant access to all papers in the database.
9. May 2005 – A draft ‘Plan of Action’ for the Taxonomy WG was posted on the web site along with a request for all members to comment on the Plan (Attachment 2).
10. May 2005 – The Plan of Action was accepted by all members of the WG. The WG also agreed upon the desirability of basing the WG’s own decision-making procedure on that proposed by Helbig et al. (2002; see reference list in attachment 3) although

reservations and potential modifications were communicated to the WG by some members.

11. July 2005 –The WG has been asked to comment upon a draft document titled 'Guidelines for the identification of species boundaries among taxa listed by the ACAP' (Attachment 3).

Timeframe for Future Work

12. A proposed work programme for the WG is shown below.

Date	Action
July - August 2005	Request comments from the WG on the draft text of the 'Guidelines for the identification of species boundaries among taxa listed by the ACAP'. Discuss any further suggestions to modify the Helbig model. Also discuss the likely outcomes if these guidelines are stringently applied to the taxa listed by ACAP.
September 2005	Finalise the 'Guidelines' text.
October – December 2005	Apply the 'Guidelines' to taxa listed in the ACAP agreement beginning with those highlighted by the Scientific Committee (MOP1; ScM1; Section 4.6) .
ACAP AC2	Recommend to the Advisory Committee a standard taxonomic reference text with all possible taxonomic synonyms for species covered by ACAP.

ACTION BY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

13. The Committee is invited to provide comments on the progress and direction of the Taxonomy Working Group.

ATTACHMENT ONE

AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS

WORKING GROUP TO REVIEW THE TAXONOMY OF ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS LISTED ON ANNEX I OF THE AGREEMENT

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Article IX 6 (b) of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) requires the Advisory Committee to “endorse a standard reference text listing the taxonomy and maintain a listing of taxonomic synonyms for all species covered by the Agreement”. This reflects the current state of flux in the taxonomy of Procellariiformes and in particular of albatrosses.

Resolution 1.5 of the First Session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP1) to ACAP provides for the establishment by the Advisory Committee of a Working Group on the Taxonomy of albatross and petrel species covered by the Agreement.

The aim of this group is to establish a transparent, defensible and highly consultative listing process. It is anticipated that the work of this group will be ongoing but the initial objective will be to reach consensus over three albatross species splits which are the subject of contention: Antipodean / Gibson’s albatross *Diomedea antipodensis / gibsoni*; Shy / White-capped albatross *Thalassarche cauta / steadi* and Buller’s / Pacific albatross *T. bulleri / platei*.

These terms of reference include the work programme for the group, details of membership and a timetable for actions.

Work Programme for the Taxonomy Group

The remit of the group is set out below (taken from section one of the work programme for the Advisory Committee; Annex 2 of Resolution 1.5 adopted at the first session of the Meeting of the Parties to ACAP).

- 1.1 Establish Working Group
- 1.2 Develop terms of reference
- 1.3 Prepare draft report on three contentious albatross species splits (MOP1 report, paragraph 7.2, Informal Scientific Meeting Report (MOP1/Doc. 15), Section 4).

Membership of Working Group

Party / Signatory/ Observer	Member	Organisation / position
Australia	Mike Double, CHAIR	Australian National University
New Zealand	Geoff Chambers	University of Wellington
South Africa	Peter Ryan	University of Cape Town
United Kingdom	Mark Tasker	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
BirdLife International	Michael Brooke	BirdLife International

Timetable for progress

The following timetable has been updated from the Advisory Committee (AC) work programme (Annex 2 of Resolution 1.5) to provide for a progress report to the first meeting of the ACAP Advisory Committee (AC1), 20-22 July 2005.

Action	To be completed by	Responsibility
1.1 Establish Working Group: identify Working Group Chair and membership	End February 2005	Interim Secretariat (IS) / AC
1.2 (i) Develop draft terms of reference	End March 2005	WG Chair / IS/ AC
1.2 (ii) Circulate draft terms of reference to Advisory Committee for Agreement	End April 2005	Secretariat
1.3 (i) Develop bibliographic database to draw together and summarise scientific literature relating to the taxonomy of Procellariiformes	End March 2005	WG Chair
1.3 (ii) Prepare progress report for the first meeting of the ACAP Advisory Committee (AC1)	End June 2005	WG Chair
1.4 Develop and provide advice to AC on the construction and maintenance of species lists as appropriate	Ongoing	WG
1.5 Provide annual reports to AC on WG activities	Ongoing	WG Chair

ATTACHMENT TWO

TAXONOMY WG - PROPOSED PLAN OF ACTION

1. Consider adopting the model presented by Helbig et al. (2002) 'Guidelines for assigning species rank' to the taxa listed in the ACAP agreement.
2. Propose modifications to the Helbig model (perhaps to assist the decision-making process for allopatric seabird taxa). Discuss the desirability of using the taxonomic category of 'superspecies'.
3. Produce a draft text of a document presenting the 'Guidelines for the identification of species boundaries among taxa listed by the ACAP'.
4. Request comments on the draft version of the 'Guidelines for the identification of species boundaries among taxa listed by the ACAP' and discuss further modifications to the Helbig model. Also discuss the likely outcomes if these guidelines are stringently applied to the taxa listed by ACAP.
5. Apply the 'Guidelines' to taxa listed in the ACAP agreement beginning with those highlighted by the Scientific Committee (MOP1; ScM1; Section 4.6).
6. Recommend to the Advisory Committee a standard taxonomic reference text with all possible taxonomic synonyms for species covered by ACAP.