

PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP AN IOTC SEABIRD WORK PLAN

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SUMMARY

The development and adoption of a seabird strategy and action plan is proposed. This strategy should be informed by relevant IOTC Resolutions and Recommendations to reduce levels of seabird bycatch across its fisheries, and the large volume of work presented at the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch plus other relevant information. This will facilitate a strategic and co-ordinated approach to seabird bycatch management in IOTC convention area.

KEYWORDS

IOTC, tuna fisheries, Indian Ocean, seabird, bycatch.

1. Introduction

IOTC has recognised that their fisheries are having a measurable and concerning impact on seabird species, and thus the need to reduce seabird bycatch in these fisheries. IOTC has adopted measures to achieve the aim of reducing seabird bycatch, namely Resolution 10/06 and Recommendation 05/09, which were further superseded by Resolution 12/06. This Resolution outlines technical bycatch mitigation measures that vessels are required to implement in defined areas, in addition to the assessment of seabird bycatch and the implementation of National Plans of Action (NPOAs) for Reducing Incidental Catches of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries by CPCs. "Other" measures include the recording of data on incidental catch of seabirds by species through observers in accordance with Recommendation 05/09, and to report these data annually. A formal review of the efficacy of Resolution 12/06 is due to take place in 2022.

Over the years, seabird bycatch has been a standing item on the agenda of IOTC's Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch, and CPC scientists and others have presented a large volume of work dealing with seabird bycatch, its mitigation, assessment and monitoring. This has included the results of studies to quantify the effectiveness of current or new technical bycatch mitigation measures, guidelines for the collection and reporting of seabird bycatch and associated data from observer programmes, risk assessment approaches, information from observer programmes that has been used to monitor bycatch levels over time, best practice protocols for handling seabirds, and approaches for improving the identification of incidentally caught seabirds, amongst others.

IOTC has also recognised the need to consider seabird bycatch at a wider scale and has contributed to regional and global assessments of seabird bycatch associated with pelagic longline fisheries. Two recent initiatives are of particular relevance:

- FAO Common Oceans Tuna Project: a global estimate of seabird bycatch in Southern Hemisphere pelagic longline fisheries (BirdLife South Africa, 2019).
- Toward mitigation of seabird bycatch: Large-scale effectiveness of night setting and Tori lines across multiple pelagic longline fleets (Jiménez et al, 2020).

Prior to these assessments, the CCSBT Effectiveness of Seabird Mitigation Measures Technical Group produced a scoping paper on potential methods for measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of tuna RFMO seabird Conservation and Management Measures.

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It would be useful to consider how best to translate the outcomes of these assessments, and indeed other information and outputs, into an adaptive and informed approach to the management of seabird bycatch in IOTC fisheries. Such an approach would help inform the indicators under an Ecosystem Based approach to Fisheries Management (EBFM) and the IOTC Ecosystem Report Card.

2. Proposal

With the context outlined in Section 1, we propose that a multi-year seabird strategy and action plan be developed to help guide and evaluate efforts to reduce seabird bycatch in IOTC fisheries. Such a plan could:

1. Serve as a tool to underpin an adaptive approach to the management of seabird bycatch.
2. Ensure that the various actions and initiatives relating to seabird bycatch mitigation are clearly articulated, prioritised, routinely monitored and, where necessary, modified.
3. Facilitate a collaborative, co-ordinated and informed approach to seabird bycatch management by IOTC and others.

The plan would be informed by the relevant IOTC Resolutions and Recommendations and would also serve to provide the linkages to other IOTC work, and indeed "external", wider-scale seabird bycatch related initiatives.

The objectives and actions for such a plan might include, but not be limited to, the following aspects:

- Facilitate a link between the outputs of ongoing and new research and the review of seabird conservation measures, as well as the assessment of seabird bycatch in IOTC fisheries, both outlined in Resolution 12/06.
- Support and monitor the implementation of NPoAs by CPCs, as outlined in Resolution 12/06.
- Reflect on the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna multi-year seabird strategy (adopted at their 2019 Commission meeting), aspects of which could be considered in developing an IOTC-specific strategy, and with which synergies can be realised.

Pulling together the various initiatives (and their outputs) that have been undertaken, and continue to be progressed, into a coherent plan will help facilitate an efficient and effective approach to this task. As indicated, the plan would helpfully identify priority areas and actions, as well as roles and responsibilities.

3. References

BirdLife South Africa (2019), Report of the Final Global Seabird Bycatch Assessment Workshop, 25 February – 1 March 2019. Skukuza Conference Center, Kruger National Park, South Africa.

Jiménez, S., Domingo, A., Winker, H., Parker, D., Gianuca, D., Neves, T., Coelho, R. and Kerwath, S., 2020. Towards mitigation of seabird bycatch: large-scale effectiveness of night setting and Tori lines across multiple pelagic longline fleets. *Biological Conservation*, 247, p.108642.