



**Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels**

**Third Meeting of Advisory Committee**

*Valdivia, Chile, 12 - 15 June 2007*

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**OBSERVER REPORT ON THE MEETING OF THE INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION'S (IATTC) STOCK ASSESSMENT REVIEW (SAR) WORKING GROUP  
7-11TH MAY, 2007, La Jolla, CA, USA**

**Author: USA and BirdLife International**

**Observer Report on the IATTC Stock Assessment Review (SAR) Working Group Meeting  
7-11<sup>th</sup> May, 2007, La Jolla  
Kim Rivera (USA) and Cleo Small (BirdLife International )**

**Summary**

Seabirds was on the agenda of the IATTC's Stock Assessment Working Group meeting May 7-11, 2007, in La Jolla, USA. The working documents for the IATTC's Stock Assessment Working Group meeting are at: <http://www.iattc.org/IATTCandAIDCPMeetingMay07ENG.htm>. The meeting report will also be posted there once available. Powerpoint presentations from the meeting are also available at this site.

Since 2005, the IATTC has increasingly been addressing seabird-related issues. Actions and recommendations have included:

- Resolution C-05-01 on Incidental Mortality of Seabirds (73<sup>rd</sup> Meeting IATTC, 2005);
- that the Commission coordinate with the Western & Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), and other tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) as appropriate, in its implementation of seabird resolutions and the development of scientific information and reports that support this implementation. This could include practical areas of cooperation on the mitigation of seabird bycatch. (7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the IATTC's Stock Assessment Working Group (SAWG), 2006);
- The IATTC should develop, in coordination with the other RFMOs, a strategy to mitigate bycatches in the different fisheries involved. The program should include standardization of data collection (whenever possible), discussion of research programs and activities to be undertaken in each, and a mechanism for the timely sharing of results. This item could be included in the agenda of the upcoming Kobe meeting. (7<sup>th</sup> Meeting SAWG, 2006);
- The Stock Assessment Working Group suggest areas where mitigation measures for reducing seabird mortality could be most effectively adopted (*i.e.*, where bird distributions and longline effort overlap), as well as suggest possible mitigation measures in these areas of vulnerability. The Commission should then consider mitigation measures at its June 2007 meeting. (6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the IATTC's Bycatch Working Group (BWG), 2007); and that
- Seabird bycatch data be collected from all tuna longliners, with consideration given to making the provision of such data mandatory. (6<sup>th</sup> Meeting BWG, 2007).

The IATTC Secretariat prepared a paper (SAR-8-14) outlining options for IATTC in relation to seabirds. These options include:

- a seabird bycatch mitigation requirement, following the approach used by the WCPFC
- a proposal for the geographical area in which this requirement should apply
- collection of data and monitoring the effectiveness of mitigation measures through observer programs
- collection of information on the vessels, gear, and fishing operations of all artisanal and industrial longline fisheries under the purview of the IATTC
- encouraging further research on mitigation measures for pelagic fisheries

The IATTC will consider the recommendations from the Stock Assessment Working Group's 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting (May 2007) as well as the staff recommendations noted in SAR-8-14 at its 75<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Commission in Cancun, Mexico, June 25 to 29, 2007.

**1. Background**

The IATTC Stock Assessment Review (SAR) Working Group is an informal group that discusses IATTC staff stock assessments and recommendations before they go to the Commission. Unlike other RFMOs, IATTC does not have a scientific committee and stock assessments and recommendations are produced by IATTC staff themselves. Until recently the IATTC has focused almost exclusively on its purse seine

fisheries: data collection for longline fisheries lags behind. Note, a scientific advisory committee will be formed upon ratification of the Antigua Convention by Commission members.

## **2. Seabird bycatch papers presented at meeting**

- **US NOAA Fisheries**

The US presented 3 papers, SAR-8-12b, c, d. The US presentation focused on four key areas: assessment of impacts of fisheries on seabirds, geographic areas of overlap between IATTC fisheries and seabirds, observer data collection, and effective seabird mitigation devices and methods. The presentation emphasized the need to consider both direct and indirect impacts of fisheries on seabirds and included seabird distribution data from the US's at-sea surveys program in the Eastern Tropical Pacific (coverage is in tropical regions, so mostly non-albatross areas). The presentation also emphasized a conclusion from the Hobart pelagic mitigation workshop: a concern that RFMOs don't institutionalize mitigation measures that haven't been proven.

Taiwan expressed interested in standardization of data collection by observer programs. Taiwan has asked observers to bring specimens to port, but this isn't proving practical and is using photographs as an alternative.

- **Taiwan Fisheries Agency**

Taiwan presented paper SAR-8-12e on seabird and shark bycatches in the Pacific Ocean based on Taiwanese observer data (13 observer trips in Pacific in 2002-2005). Thirty birds were caught, most in temperate regions. Eighty-seven percent of the seabirds were albatrosses and petrels. Vessels targeting albacore are mostly setting at night (10pm-1am), while vessels targeting bigeye set during the day. Albacore boats thaw bait for at least two hours, and many use 100-200g line weights.

Note, it would be helpful to have the seabird bycatch rates expressed by target fishery (not combined) and to have information on time of sets. Improvements to species identification of seabird species in bycatch sample may also be helpful.

- **BirdLife International**

BLI staff presented an update on the global procellariiform tracking database. New data from the Tagging of Pacific Pelagics program will soon be available and provides information on non-breeding Laysan and Black-footed albatross distribution, both which occur within the IATTC area.

- **IATTC Secretariat**

IATTC staff presented paper SAR-8-14 and it contained management and research options for consideration. These include suggestions on data collection, research, and outlines the WCPFC mitigation measure as a measure that IATTC could adopt. The option being proposed is to require industrial longliners to adopt mitigation measures based on WCPFC, within an area north of 20 degrees North, south of 30 degrees South, and up the Humboldt Current and around the Galapagos Islands. Staff explained that in WCPFC the technical specifications for the mitigation measures were still under development, and some of the measures in Column B were not yet proven but were there to encourage experimentation.

## **3. Seabird discussion**

Some felt there was room for further refinement of the WCPFC measure: some of the possible combinations are not practically possible, and there are other measures that could be added to the list, e.g. thawing of bait. It was emphasized that other factors also affect seabirds e.g. oceanographic factors.

There was also discussion about the need for requiring combinations of measures. It was emphasized that trials of single measures have proven effective in the Hawaii fishery (although note that the Hawaii fishery requires combinations of mitigation measures). While this is true, all fisheries in which there has been effective reduction of seabird bycatch have relied on the use of a combination of measures. However, the group noted that in the IATTC area there are fewer deep diving seabird species so this may make mitigation more straightforward.

Several times during the meeting, it was emphasized that there were several characteristics of artisanal vessels which mean they are less likely to interact with seabirds. These include low deck height, use of thawed bait, and side setting. It was also emphasized that there were limitations to the available information on waved albatross.

A need was identified for standardizing formats for reporting to IATTC on bird bycatch. It would be good to have guidelines on reporting on bycatch.

#### **4. Ecosystem considerations**

The IATTC also has a program of work to model the ecosystem in the East Pacific Ocean. Paper SAR-8-17 summarized overall population status of the components of the ecosystem, including seabirds. The ECOPATH model for the East Pacific Ocean was published in the tuna commission Bulletin Series in the 1990s and the plan is to update this model soon. There are 38 components in the model, including two bird groups. Note that the model is focused on tropical areas of the East Pacific. It will therefore be of particular interest in relation to indirect effects on seabirds.

Also of interest is that the IATTC produces annual estimates of average trophic level of its purse seine fisheries. It was asked if there was a prospect for similar trophic analysis being available for longline fisheries. IATTC would like to be able to do this analysis, but are currently limited by data gaps for the longline fleets. However it is going to review available data.

**5. Conclusion:** The IATTC Secretariat will update paper SAR-8-14 to incorporate information presented at the SAR meeting, and some of the comments from the discussion.

In addition to the options outlined in paper SAR-8-14, the SAR meeting made a recommendation on seabirds to the Commission which includes the following elements:

- Develop a standard reporting format for reporting on seabird bycatch
- Bird banding projects should develop posters for fishermen to explain what to do with bands that are found. Care should be taken to not offer incentives for these bands which may cause the intentional killing of the birds
- Note that there may be indirect as well as direct impacts of the IATTC fisheries on seabirds, and the IATTC ecosystem model should include seabirds
- Parties should continue to examine the effectiveness of mitigation measures to reduce seabird interactions

These options and recommendations will be considered by the Commission at its annual meeting in June 2007.