



Partnership for  
nature and people

## **BirdLife International Report on recent Activities to the Fifteenth meeting of the Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERSWG15)**

### Introduction

BirdLife International is a global partnership of over 120 conservation organisations. Since 1997, in response to the dramatic declines in many albatross and petrel populations worldwide, BirdLife International has undertaken a body of scientific, policy and advocacy work to try to improve the conservation status of albatrosses and petrels through collaborative work with fishers, fishery managers and scientists. The sections below provide an update to our work since ERSWG14.

#### **1. Albatross Task Force**

The ATF is a collaborative team of grass roots engagement projects across four countries in South America and southern Africa, including Argentina, Chile, South Africa, and Namibia. The objective of the ATF is to reduce the incidental bycatch of seabirds through the implementation of simple solutions in high-risk fisheries.

In 2023, the team focused on supporting the capacity development of observer programs and inspectorates to monitor seabird bycatch and increasing compliance with bycatch mitigation measures in the Argentinean trawl fleet through the use Remote Electronic Monitoring, resulting in over 80% utilization of bird-scaring lines based on sampled data from cameras deployed onboard vessels. Meanwhile, in Chile the priority was to equip several vessels with modified purse seine nets, which have been identified as a mitigation option to reduce entanglement of shearwaters during fishing operations targeting sardine and anchovy. In South Africa, at-sea trials were conducted to support the implementation of hook-shielding devices in the domestic pelagic longline fleet, following indication the industry could prefer this option for tuna fishing within the EEZ. In Namibia, the ATF is testing and distributing steel weights to the local demersal longline fleet, to increase efficiency at sinking the gear away from foraging birds than the more traditionally used concrete and stone weights.

#### **2. BirdLife engagement with high seas fleets**

##### **CCSBT Seabird Project**

As a project partner, BirdLife has been working with the CCSBT Seabird Project coordinator to provide scientific expertise and support. In collaboration with the Secretariat, BirdLife has

- Chaired SBWG online meetings,
- Developed and delivered industry workshops (x 2) in Japan (Feb 2024)
- Participated in the EM Inception workshop for component 3 of the Seabird Project (Mar 2024)

BirdLife continues to coordinate with the Secretariat to support delivery of industry workshops for other CPCs to ensure the success of this project.

##### **Port-Based Outreach in the Pacific**

Since 2017, BirdLife International Pacific (BLI-Pacific) has led a Port-base Outreach (PBO) project at the Port of Suva in Fiji. The goal is to improve fishers understanding, and implementation of mitigation measures that reduce the incidental capture of non-target species, such as seabirds, sharks and rays, and cetaceans. Fiji is considered a hub for pelagic longline fleets, including distant water

fishing fleets targeting SBT. The outreach program has visited 433 individual fishing vessels, registered with the WCPFC, that operate south of 25° – 30° South since 2017. Bird-scaring lines was the preferred method for most captains due to its minimal interaction with daily fishing operations. However, implementation across the fleet remains poor. Early responses from vessels as to why they didn't deploy compliant mitigation measures included the unavailability of bird-scaring lines from local handlers and ad-hoc designs on board. Subsequently, BLI-Pacific invited a local women's group to construct tori-lines to provide to the vessels. An expert from the New Zealand Fisheries Department taught the PBO officer and the women's group members the approved NZ bird-scaring line design. The women's group has made 62 tori lines, all have been given to vessels.

In early 2024, BLI-Pacific ran a bycatch mitigation workshop in Tahiti, French Polynesia in collaboration with Direction Des Ressources Marines and Moana Nui, the French Polynesian observer program. The Tahitian tuna longline fleet, consisting of 85 longline fishing vessels, faces challenges related to species of special interest (SSIs; seabirds, turtles, sharks, rays and cetacean) bycatch in the French Polynesian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Key concerns include interactions with threatened seabird species and the impact of fishing activities on the rich biodiversity of the region and ensuring the fleet can meet conditions of their MSC certification. The workshop focused on tori line deployment and specifications. We worked with the crew and observer program to identify local sources of tori line materials and demonstrated tori line construction and installed two tori lines on vessels and provide another four to be installed when the vessels return from sea. Further work will include technical training workshops provided by BirdLife International and Te Papa Atawhai (New Zealand Department of Conservation) in Papeete. The aim of these will be to provide technical training to the engagement officer and observers to address vessel-based problem solving and training of mitigation measure implementation. Training videos and other resources will be developed to supplement existing resources provided by DRM and Moana Nui Development. A bycatch training module will be developed for crew, that may be added to the Health and Safety training required by the French Polynesian Government. We are also putting a focus on the development of data collection and analysis protocols, aiming to quantify seabird bycatch rates and monitor changes over time in French Polynesian pelagic longline fisheries.

### **3. Communications and Outreach**

BirdLife have continued our educational work through South Georgia 'albatross stories'. We worked with the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) to document the lives of individual albatross on Bird Island, South Georgia to raise awareness of the birds and the conservation issues they face. This has been promoted on social media/online in Japan and the UK.

BirdLife International has produced an animation series about seabird bycatch as an educational tool for policy makes and industry, which is available in English, Japanese, and Chinese. These videos are available at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5rc1uittC8&list=PLZdqdnP9kIGU0U2WBcWX\\_nGPLyiv9bv&ab\\_channel=BirdLifeInternational](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5rc1uittC8&list=PLZdqdnP9kIGU0U2WBcWX_nGPLyiv9bv&ab_channel=BirdLifeInternational)

### **4. Engagement with the tuna supply chain**

Together with Pew Charitable Trusts and Errhalt Consulting, BirdLife co-hosted a webinar in Japan focused on the benefits of increased sustainability and transparency in fisheries in the Pacific. BirdLife presented case studies and the benefits of electronic monitoring to reduce seabird bycatch. Other presenters were from academia as well as an advisor to Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. Attendees included key players in the seafood supply chain, government officials, and representatives of the fishing industry.

The partnership between SeaBOS (Seafood Business for Ocean Stewardship) and BirdLife Marine Programme has become official, and BirdLife continues to support the global initiative and its

member companies implement Endangered Species Strategy through providing technical input. We will continue to engage with SeaBOS to achieve the objectives of their Endangered Species Strategy.

The BirdLife Marine Programme has actively engaged with the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) in conducting “bycatch audits” for a total of nine international retailers (such as US based Publix or UK based Tesco), identifying bycatch issues within their seafood supply chain and suggesting actions to improve transparency and promote mitigation actions in relation to bycatch, including for seabirds. For nearly all retailers’, at least one Tuna fishery posing a potential bycatch risk to seabirds was identified: largely operating in the Pacific or Indian ocean.

In addition, the BirdLife Marine Programme maintains a continued engagement with the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), as being part of its Technical Advisory Board, and more generally in participating to the assessment process of key fisheries with a known or suspected seabird bycatch concern. This included over the years at least five Tuna fisheries based in the Pacific or Atlantic Ocean.

BirdLife also contributes for the development of the “Seabird-safe Fishing Toolkit”, as a member of the Expert Panel. The Toolkit aims to support fleets by making accessible essential information on practical methods to avoid seabird bycatch and reduce the impact of tuna fisheries on seabirds. This project is a New Zealand-funded project, with the support of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Oceans and Fisheries Working Group. The project is co-sponsored by Chile, People’s Republic of China, Peru, Chinese Taipei, and the United States. The toolkit will be developed over 2024 and presented to the APEC Oceans and Fisheries Working Group in August 2024.

As part of the collaboration on seabird bycatch between the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, the UK BirdLife partner) and Taiwan Wild Bird Federation (TWBF), the TWBF has been working with FCF Co Ltd, one of the largest tuna traders in the world. Through this the TWBF took part as a panelist during the “Maintaining Marine Biodiversity” session at the International Symposium on Fishery Sustainability 2023 held in Kaohsiung in November 2023. With a focus on sustainable sourcing, biodiversity preservation, and seafood traceability, the event aimed to provide a platform for enhancing environmental sustainability in the seafood sector. Currently further discussions are underway between RSPB/TWBF and FCF on how to further the cooperation.

## **5. Global Seabird Tracking Database**

BirdLife continues to manage the Global Seabird Tracking Database, which was established in 2004 ([www.seabirdtracking.org](http://www.seabirdtracking.org)). Through the collaboration of scientists worldwide, the database now includes 1344 datasets from 252 scientists, contributing over 38 million data points for 166 species. In 2023 we completed a review of the data within the database compared to published studies of seabird tracking data to identify data gaps in the Database and where these can be filled with published data. 2024 marks 20 years of the Database and communications celebrating the collaborative conservation successes facilitated by the Database will be shared online.

## **6. NACES Marine Protected Area**

The North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea-basin (NACES) MPA was designated on 1st October 2021 by the OSPAR Convention and protects one of the most important concentrations of migratory seabirds in the Atlantic. BirdLife led the analysis of seabird tracking data that led to the identification of the site, and it is the first high seas MPA identified based on tracking data. BirdLife is continuing to support the site through the developing a monitoring plan of human activities from remote sensing data and associated management recommendations and sharing these with relevant competent authorities for their consideration.

## **7. International Treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions (BBNJ or High Seas Treaty)**

BirdLife International is a partner in the [High Seas Alliance \(HSA\)](#) alongside 50+ other NGOs, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The HSA has played a pivotal role in the negotiations to reach the High Seas Agreement (March 23, 2023). The High Seas Treaty seeks to improve governance over the high seas, aiming to protect and sustain marine life from overfishing, climate change, shipping, and activities such as deep-sea mining. As countries begin to ratify the High Seas Treaty, management of activities and identification of important sites for biodiversity are being further developed. Once in force, Member countries will be able to submit proposals for protection and increased management of such sites. BirdLife, along with our partners, are using seabird tracking data (described above) to provide scientifically robust evidence for these proposals. Several sites have been identified and we look forward to discussing opportunities for collaboration on the management of them to protect seabirds along with southern bluefin tuna stocks.

## **Annex 1**

Summary of papers submitted to ERSWG15 (CCSBT-ERS/24XX/)

1. (BirdLife International) BirdLife International report on recent activities (ERSWG15 Agenda Item 3)
2. (BirdLife International) Status of seabird mitigation measures in RFMOS (ERSWG15 Agenda Item 5.1.4)
3. (BirdLife International) Global prevalence of setting longlines at dawn highlights bycatch risk for threatened albatross (ERSWG15 Agenda Item 5.1.4; [CC 18 - Info 02](#))
4. (ACAP and BirdLife International) ACAP Species Assessment distribution maps: 2024 update (ERSWG15 Agenda Item 5.1)