



CCSBT-EC/2410/08

## CHAIR'S REPORT FROM THE FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE ECOLOGICALLY RELATED SPECIES WORKING GROUP (ERSWG 15)

### Background and purpose

This is a short report to summarise the key activities and advice from the Fifteenth meeting of the Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERSWG 15) of the CCSBT. The full report of ERSWG 15 is at CCSBT-EC/2410/Rep03. As Chair of the ERSWG, I am, unfortunately, unable to attend the meeting of the Extended Commission in October 2024 to make a presentation.

### Seabirds

In line with the Multi-Year Seabird Strategy (adopted at CCSBT 29), a key focus for ERSWG 15 was to discuss and consider the results of a Spatially-Explicit Fisheries Risk Assessment (SEFRA) for seabird fatalities in CCSBT fisheries that had been developed collaboratively by Members with New Zealand and Japan taking leading roles. The SEFRA had been the subject of two meetings of the Technical ERS Working Group (ERS-Tech) attended by several Members and some additional intersessional exchanges. The final report from the group was finalised during the ERSWG 15 meeting and then tabled for the consideration of the full ERSWG. Also available to ERSWG 15 was the latest information from the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) on the status and trends of seabird populations that use waters where SBT fisheries occur. Based on this new information, ERSWG 15 agreed to revise its advice on seabirds to the following:

- *The level of interaction between seabirds and SBT fisheries remains a significant concern;*
- *The ERSWG noted that the most recent version of the Spatially-Explicit Fisheries Risk Assessment, SEFRA, indicates that Wandering and Royal Albatross species groups are at high risk. Species in these groups are of high conservation concern and ACAP indicated that some populations are in sharp decline;*
- *The SEFRA indicates areas with higher risk in some parts of the Tasman Sea (especially), Southern Atlantic, and Southern Indian Ocean. These areas account for a large proportion of the modelled risk to seabirds from SBT surface longline fisheries, but contain a very small proportion of SBT surface longline fishing effort;*
- *Based on the best scientific information available, the ERSWG recommends that CCSBT Members consider taking further actions that would ensure robust seabird mitigation measures and effective monitoring of implementation of the mitigation measures, whilst minimising impacts on SBT surface longline fisheries effort.*

Notwithstanding the very significant progress made inter-sessionally to advance the SEFRA seabird risk assessment, additional work is required to resolve some technical issues and include data from all Members. ERSWG agreed on a suitable workplan for the rest of 2024 and 2025 and this includes an in-person meeting of the ERS-Tech in the first half of 2025. A resourcing request has been developed for the consideration of the EC (Attachment 5 of the ERSWG 15 meeting report). The ERSWG also supports the transition of the SEFRA risk assessment to the CCSBT Seabird Project which is funded as part of the FAO's Common Oceans Program Tuna Project in 2025 to maximise the use of resources available as part of Element 4 for that project.

The ERSWG also reviewed progress against all the objectives and actions of the Multi-Year Seabird Strategy. A revised timeframe for the Multi-Year Seabird Strategy Action items was created and is provided for the EC's consideration as part of the ERSWG report.

### Sharks

No papers on sharks were submitted for consideration and the meeting agreed that there were no specific or additional concerns about shark bycatch that warranted action by ERSWG 15. However, Members noted that significant gaps in observer coverage, not just those related to the COVID-19 epidemic, may be impacting ERSWG's ability to assess the impact of SBT fisheries on sharks.

### Other Ecologically Related Species

No papers on other Ecologically Related Species (ERS) were submitted for consideration. Australia gave verbal updates on issues related to fur seal fatalities and depredation of SBT in their fisheries. Based on the information provided, the ERSWG agreed that these issues did not seem to be substantial or warrant action by ERSWG 15.

The ERSWG reviewed a draft Ecologically Related Species and Bycatch Plan that had been drafted by the Secretariat as requested by SFMWG 6 and CCSBT 30. The objectives of the plan were refined and it was noted that the scope excluded seabirds (making the ERS and Bycatch Plan complementary to the agreed Multi-Year Seabird Strategy). Members committed to developing lists of non-target shark species to be covered by this plan with a view to agreeing a final list at the 2025 meeting of the ERS-Tech. A final draft of the plan should be available for consideration by CCSBT 32 in 2025.

### Observer Coverage

As noted previously, significant gaps in observer coverage, not just those related to the COVID-19 epidemic, may be impacting ERSWG's ability to assess the impact of SBT fisheries on ERS and fulfil its mandate.

The ERSWG reviewed the impacts of electronic monitoring (EM) on ERS data in light of the High-Level Guiding Principles for EM/S (adopted at CCSBT 30). The WG considered whether EM could address any ERS information gaps that are not well addressed by the existing Scientific Observer Program Standards (SOPS) and whether changes to the SOPS would be required. Members had mixed views on the capabilities of EM, but agreed that hook-shielding devices should be included as one of the specified measures in the ERS Data Exchange.

As requested by CC 18, ERSWG 15 reviewed the suitability of the current method used to calculate the representativeness of scientific observer coverage. Some possible alternative approaches were developed and discussed, including some calculated examples, but the ERSWG eventually agreed that the current method should be retained.

#### Other issues

The ERSWG reviewed progress against the revised CCSBT Strategic Plan 2023–28 that took account of recommendations from the 2021 CCSBT Performance Review. Members discussed and agreed the content of the Report Back that will be provided for the consideration of EC on progress against the Strategic Plan.

Formal Terms of Reference (ToR) for the ERS-Tech (now held in the years between in-person ERSWG meetings) were discussed. It was thought that having well-defined ToR would provide transparency and clarity in the administration of the group, including attendance by observers. The draft ToR drew heavily from those for other CCSBT subsidiary bodies, with the addition of a reference to related CCSBT rules on confidentiality and publication of documents submitted to ERS-Tech. The draft ToR have also been provided for the consideration of the EC as part of the ERSWG report.

Excerpt from the report from ERSWG15 summarising all recommendations and advice for the EC.

119. The ERSWG recommends that the EC adopt/agree to the following:

- 1) The ERSWG has revised its advice on seabirds to the following:
  - The level of interaction between seabirds and SBT fisheries remains a significant concern.
  - The ERSWG noted that the most recent version of the Spatially Explicit Fisheries Risk Assessment, SEFRA, indicates that Wandering and Royal Albatross species groups are at high risk. Species in these groups are of high conservation concern and ACAP indicated that some populations are in sharp decline.
  - The SEFRA indicates areas with higher risk in some parts of the Tasman Sea (especially), Southern Atlantic, and Southern Indian Ocean. These areas account for a large proportion of the modelled risk to seabirds from SBT surface longline fisheries, but contain a very small proportion of SBT surface longline fishing effort.
  - Based on the best scientific information available, the ERSWG recommends that CCSBT Members consider taking further actions that would ensure robust seabird mitigation measures and effective monitoring of implementation of the mitigation measures, whilst minimising impacts on SBT surface longline fisheries effort
- 2) The SEFRA Workplan and its associated resource request;
- 3) The revised timeframe for the Multi-Year Seabird Strategy Action items;
- 4) Terms of Reference for the Technical Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERS-Tech); and
- 5) Add hook-shielding devices as one of the specified measures in the ERS Data Exchange.

120. The ERSWG wishes to advise the EC of the following matters:

- 1) Note the outputs of the most recent SEFRA exercise;
- 2) There were no specific or additional concerns about shark bycatch that warranted action by ERSWG 15, noting that significant gaps in observer coverage may be impacting ERSWG's ability to assess the impact of SBT Fisheries on sharks;
- 3) ERSWG has provided the EC with a report back against the objectives and agreed actions contained in the CCSBT Strategic Plan;
- 4) ERSWG recommends that the current methodology applied to calculate representativeness be retained without change; and
- 5) ERSWG will be seeking approval from EC 32 on the adoption of an ERS Bycatch Action Plan.