Kobe II - Bycatch Workshop

Brisbane, Australia, June 23-25, 2010

Justification for change

BirdLife International has been centrally involved with reducing bycatch of seabirds (especially globally threatened species) for over a decade. In 2005, BirdLife published the definitive review of the performance of RFMOs in this regard[1]; since then it has worked in close collaboration with tuna RFMOs (tRFMOS) because:

a) many seabird populations, especially albatrosses and petrels, are threatened with extinction as a result of being killed and injured in fishing operations managed by tuna RFMOs;

b) Article 5 (f) of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement requires RFMOs to establish conservation and management measures to minimise catch of non-target species;

c) best-practice solutions are widely available and implementing them would both increase the economic sustainability of fisheries and remove one the greatest threats to seabird survival at-sea.

Based on these premises and further background and justifications detailed in this document BirdLife **recommends** that tuna RFMOs:

A) Establish a mechanism, responsive and reporting to tRFMOs ,and fully consistent with the FAO-Best Practice Technical Guidelines framework, that can provide expert scientific advice to all tRFMOs on:

(i) best-practice mitigation for each of the main taxonomic groups involved (via expert panels) at the most appropriate area and fishery-specific scales;

(ii) the priority research and development needed to improve existing and develop new mitigation techniques and devices (also via taxon-specific expert panels if desired);

(iii) optimum bycatch data collection procedures and protocols, involving the use of suitably trained scientific fisheries observers, at levels appropriate to achieve clearly stated objectives;

B) Ensure that all the recommendations deriving from the above process are submitted directly to the decision-making bodies of each tRFMO.

C) Establish a process for harnessing the expertise and resources of all stakeholders (e.g. RFMO members, observers, IGOs, NGOs) to contribute in particular to:

(i) provision of scientific data and expert scientific advice;

(ii) research on, and development of, new and improved mitigation measures;

(iii) data collection initiatives, especially involving appropriate training for fisheries observers, including monitoring the success of implementation of mitigation measures;

(iv) education and outreach programmes, ranging from support and training in use of best-practice mitigation to explaining how bycatch issues are being tackled by tRFMOs in ways that enhance fishing efficiency and protect globally threatened seabirds and other marine species.

[1] http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/seabirds/rfmo_report.pdf

Background

BirdLife has not only participated in relevant meetings of all tRFMOs but has also pioneered related initiatives; together these have involved:

a) assessing known and potential impacts of bycatch on seabirds, especially using remote-tracking data to define overlap with fisheries posing particular threats[2];

b) collaborating in formal Ecological Risk Assessments (ERAs) for seabirds, particularly those within WCPFC[3] and ICCAT[4] and developing guidelines for the general use of ERAs in fisheries bycatch management;

c) contributing to numerous reviews of best-practice mitigation, culminating in the production of definitive Factsheets (http://www.birdlife.org/seabirds/bycatch/albatross.html), summarising the latest knowledge, which will be updated annually in collaboration with the Seabird Bycatch Working Group of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP);

d) undertaking a global review, fishery-by-fishery, of seabird bycatch in longline fisheries.

BirdLife also played a key role in facilitating the development of the FAO-Best Practice Technical Guidelines (BPTG, adopted by FAO in June 2009)[5], which provide a vital tool for delivering the IPOA-Seabirds through: (1) advice to assist States and RFMOs in implementation; and (2) extending advice to other relevant fisheries (e.g. trawl and gillnets). Thus, the FAO-BPTG provide a detailed framework which RFMOs can use to guide and assess their progress towards reducing seabird bycatch. They also provide a model that could be very effective for addressing bycatch of other non-target species in tuna longline fisheries.

In 2005, BirdLife also established the Albatross Task Force (ATF), to work alongside fishers and fishery managers to implement best-practice bycatch mitigation. The ATF currently employs 14 instructors working in 7 countries in South America and southern Africa and has already achieved some substantial reductions in seabird bycatch. It also includes a detailed mitigation research programme to further improve measures to mitigate seabird bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries. This includes new devices, such as Safe Leads (designed to increase crew safety in relation to use of line weights) and a 'hook pod', which releases the baited hook at 10m depth. These will become operational in 2011.

In BirdLife's 2005 review of RFMOs, only CCAMLR had achieved comprehensive reduction in seabird bycatch, with tRFMOs lagging far behind in relation to the key elements necessary to address bycatch. While BirdLife welcomes the considerable progress made by tRFMOs since then, a review update in 2009 shows how far there is still to go (see Box). This summarises progress made in the last 5 years in taking the key steps necessary to reduce seabird bycatch to a negligible level. These steps are addressed in detail, along with other process and management issues in the FAO BPTG, which provides a decision making and process framework that facilitates a strategic and transparent approach to achieving seabird bycatch reduction (Figure 1 -FAO 2009).

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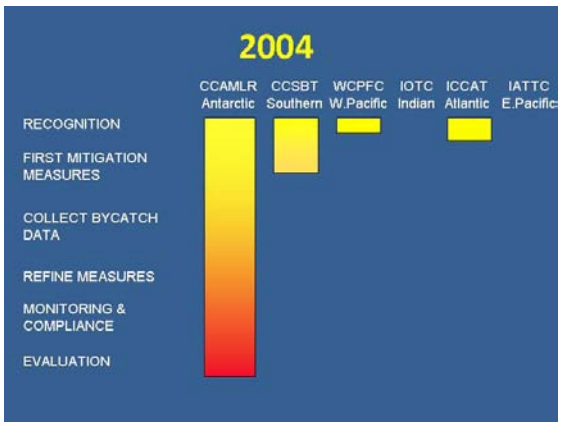
[2] http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/seabirds/tracking_ocean_wanderers.pdf

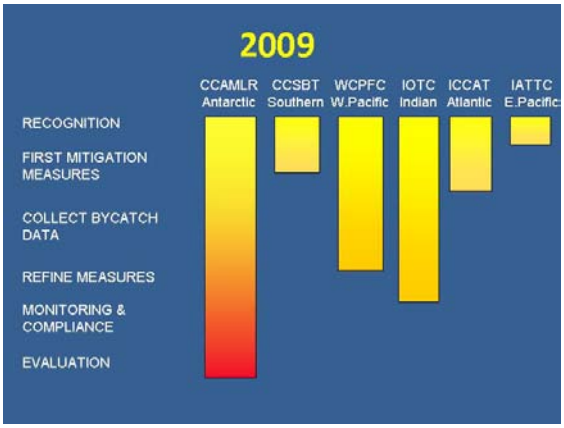
[3] https://webmail.rspb.org.uk/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://www.wcpfc.int/system/files/documents/meetings/scientific-committee/5th-regular-session/ecosystem-and-bycatch-swg/working-papers/SC5-EB-WP-06%2520%255BSpatial_risk_indicators_seabirds_final%255D.pdf

[4] http://www.iccat.int/Documents/Meetings/Docs/2009_SC-ECO_Rep_ENG.pdf

[5] FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries (Suppl. 2) Fishing Operations - Best Practice to reduce incidental catch of seabirds in capture fisheries (FAO 2009) http://www.fao.org/fishery/ipoa-seabirds/publications/en.

RFMO performance in relation to key elements required to address seabird bycatch: comparison of progress in 2004 and 2009.





Towards better progress in tRFMOS

The priority needs in respect of tRFMO bycatch issues are:

a) rapid reduction in levels and rates of non-target species through improved use of mitigation;

b) better data to measure bycatch levels and rates and their response to improved mitigation.

There is real need for better cooperation/coordination on these issues amongst tRFMOs, because:

a) non-target species readily move between tRFMO areas and risks and impacts need assessing throughout their annual and life-cycles; therefore integrated assessment across all tRFMOs is vital;

b) fishing vessels move between tRFMO areas; therefore mitigation and related management measures should, as far as possible, be consistent between these areas;

c) collection and use of bycatch data need to be as consistent as possible between tRFMOs;

d) most of the expert discussion and scientific evaluation of bycatch issues are very similar in each tRFMO; the present system of multiple independent meetings is inefficient, repetitive, uncoordinated and unnecessarily costly in terms of scarce time and resources.

On most bycatch issues and topics, and especially for seabirds, we already know enough about:

a) area/fishery-specific impacts and risks to take appropriate action now;

b) best-practice mitigation to recommend in general, and usually also on a fishery/RFMO-specific basis, where, when and how to apply the appropriate measures.

Therefore, what we need now is a new process for providing expert advice to all RFMOs and the political will to implement its recommendations rapidly and effectively throughout all tRFMOs.