

## PSG ACAP Delegate Annual Report

### Pacific Seabird Group

#### **Annual Report for 2023 on the Activities of ACAP (Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels).**

The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) is a multi-lateral agreement established to achieve and maintain a favorable conservation status for the 31 species of Procellariiforms listed in Annex 1 of the Agreement by coordinating international activity to mitigate known threats such as fisheries interactions, invasive species, climate change, light pollution, and contaminants. The participants from the 13 signatory parties and other range states and observer groups gather and share specific expertise to make useful recommendations and identify emerging problems. Since its inception PSG members have been active in the work of ACAP. As a non-governmental organization Pacific Seabird Group can participate formally by sending observers to the meetings or by what PSG has done typically which is point our members to the substantial information resources put out by ACAP on their website (<https://www.acap/aq>), and follow the work of the group by receiving reports from PSG members who participate in ACAP activities. The *Meeting of the Parties (MoP)*, the decision-making body) takes place every 3 years, with meetings of the Advisory Committee (**AC** - which provides scientific, technical, and other expert advice and information to Parties, the Secretariat, and others) in each of the intervening years.

The 13th meeting of the Advisory Committee (**AC13**) took place May 22-26, 2023, In Edinburgh, UK. It was preceded by the 11th meeting of the Seabird Bycatch Working Group (**SBWG11**, the 7th meeting of the Population and Conservation Status Working Group (**PaCSWG7**), and a joint meeting of these working groups. A Seabird Bycatch Data Workshop was also held on May 13. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, New Zealand, Peru, South Africa, Spain, the United Kingdom (UK) and Uruguay attended **AC13**. Ecuador, Norway, and France were absent. Three Range States, Canada, Namibia, United States, and one APEC member economy, and Chinese Taipei, participated as observers. In addition, two NGOs, BirdLife International and Humane Society International, attended as observers. Colleagues from Japan were present during **SBWG11**. Participants at this most recent meeting (delegates, working group members, and observers representing their respective member nations, range states, or NGOs) who also belong to the Pacific Seabird Group included Mi Ae Kim, Tom Good, Ed Melvin, Eric Gilman, Mark Tasker, Verónica López and others. The gathering included:

1. An **ACAP Seabird Bycatch Data Workshop**, held to understand and find solutions to the challenges experienced in reporting ACAP seabird bycatch indicators. The workshop identified a range of challenges faced by Parties in collecting and reporting data to inform the current "Pressure" indicators on seabird bycatch as well as potential actions that ACAP could take to address some of these challenges.
2. The **11th Meeting of the Seabird Bycatch Working Group (SBWG11)**, where continuing from previous meetings there was discussion of:

- a. non-compliance with seabird bycatch mitigation measures in many fisheries on the high seas and in some EEZs, including those of ACAP Parties. This ‘compliance crisis’ will require an elevation of ACAP’s focus on the implementation and monitoring of mitigation measures.
- b. There was discussion about the divergence between the ACAP Best Practice Advice recommending use of night setting, branch line weighting and bird scaring lines, and RFMO-adopted approaches where only two out of three best practice measures are required. Intersessional work was recommended to review the range of seabird bycatch mitigation measures used by RFMO (Regional Fisheries Management Organization) and to assess where two out of three best practice mitigation measures can be used to effectively reduce seabird bycatch.
- c. For trawl fisheries, **SBWG11** recommended the Advisory Committee encourage research on developing mitigation options to reduce seabird interactions with cables, determining relationships between seabird abundance, cable interactions and cryptic mortality (including potential use of electronic monitoring), and developing and testing options to reduce entanglement or capture of seabirds in nets during setting and hauling.
- d. For demersal longline fisheries, **SBWG11** recommended the Advisory Committee encourage research on improving sink rates of floated longlines using various gear configurations and continuing studies of haul mitigation in small-vessel demersal (and pelagic) fisheries.
- e. For pelagic longline fisheries, there was extensive discussion of research results showing that weighted hooks can negatively affect target catch rate and explaining why night setting, branch line weighting and bird scaring lines should be used in combination. The working group recommended the Advisory Committee encourage research on the effects of current ACAP Best Practice Advice for line-weighting regimes; improving branch line weighting for high seas fisheries; hook-shielding devices (e.g., the 48g Hookpod-mini); developing bird-scaring lines for smaller vessels; testing underwater bait-setting devices; evaluating combinations of night setting, branch line weighting, and bird-scaring line mitigations; encouraging studies of seabird visual, acoustic, and olfactory systems that could inform mitigation techniques; developing methods that minimize live bird haul capture; updating tracking studies to inform potential time/area management; characterizing the use of bait-casting machines; investigating how hook mass and design changes may reduce seabird bycatch; and encouraging any novel, emerging technologies.
- f. The working group continues to discourage the use of high energy lasers as seabird bycatch mitigation in any fishery due potential eye damage in seabirds, noted evidence from some fisheries that switching to deep night-time setting can significantly reduce seabird bycatch risk while maintaining target catch rates, and highlighted the importance of aerial extent when using bird scaring lines.
- g. For artisanal and small-scale fisheries, **SBWG11** recommended the Advisory Committee: 1) note important findings on bycatch in Brazilian small-scale fisheries and request Brazil continue monitoring and work urgently to reduce bycatch in these fisheries, and 2) encourage further intersessional work to populate the seabird bycatch mitigation toolbox for artisanal and small-scale fisheries to reflect updates provided to **SBWG11**.
- h. To document seabird bycatch and mitigation use, **SBWG11** recommended the Advisory Committee encourage further collaboration between Parties on using genetic techniques to identify bycaught seabird specimens as well as on using emerging technologies and

- techniques to assess fisheries compliance with seabird bycatch mitigation measures. They also recommended elevating implementation and monitoring to the same priority level as Best Practice Advice development. To encourage collaboration among Parties, **SBWG11** recommended establishing and implementing regional plans of action to address seabird bycatch, endorsing continued implementation of the current RFMO engagement strategy, and establishing an intersessional group to review and update the aims, theme-based format, and priorities of the current RFMO engagement strategy.
- i. **SBWG11** recognized that ACAP participation in the Marine Stewardship Council Fisheries Standard review process contributed to substantial improvements to a new version of the standard, which includes requirements on information, management, and outcomes of seabird bycatch; and encourage continued ACAP engagement with fishery certification processes. **SBWG** also recommended the Advisory Committee: support updating the remaining Mitigation Fact Sheets to the new simplified format in a phased approach in accordance with the prioritization identified by SBWG11, welcome development of guidance on safe handling of seabirds in purse seine fisheries, and encourage development of guidelines for other fishing gears.
3. **A Joint Meeting of the Seabird Bycatch and Population and Conservation Status Working Groups**, planned by the Advisory Committee (at **AC11**) to address cross-cutting and overarching issues relevant to both groups, such as risk assessments, listings of new species, priority populations, overlapping tools and guidelines was held between the 2 working group meetings. A risk assessment showing the time that adult, tracked individuals from ACAP High Priority Populations (populations declining at more than 3% per year, holds more than 10% of the global population, and are at risk from fisheries) spent in national and high seas areas informed the joint meeting on which countries and RFMOs should be targeted for engagement. In addition to identifying that Angola and Namibia are important areas for attention, it provided content for communications products that can highlight the seabird conservation crisis. The joint meeting recognized the potential threat posed to seabirds by wind power farms. Actions arising from the discussion were encouragement of research to understand the potential impacts of wind farms on albatrosses and petrels and having Parties and observers share information on such impacts with the ACAP Secretariat. The discussions also led to formation of a group within ACAP to improve communication of the conservation crisis for albatrosses and petrels, and to further refine and implement the communication strategy
  4. **The 7th Meeting of the Population and Conservation Status Working Group (PaCSWG7)** found:
    - a. That due to repeated failure to update the species assessments of the ACAP species, PaCSWG7 called for the re-established the Species Assessments Coordinating Group to oversee the updates of the ACAP Species Assessments. This group is designating leads for each species, providing oversight, and setting deadlines to ensure the assessments are updated. Elizabeth Flint and Roberta Swift, from USFWS, and Robert Suryan, NMFS, are the leads for the three North Pacific albatross species.
    - b. **PaCSWG7** supported the Mouse Free Marion Project, which affects eight ACAP-listed species. Anton Wolfaardt, who has long worked closely with ACAP, leads this project.
    - c. **PaCSWG7** encouraged Parties and Range States to monitor breeding populations of ACAP species, undertake certain priority tracking studies, and submit tracking data to the BirdLife International Seabird Tracking Database to enable multi-species analyses of overlap between ACAP species and fisheries.

5. The **13th Meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC13)** resulted in
- a. the Secretariat reporting of ACAP participation in several RFMO meetings, renewal of Cooperation Guidelines with ICCAT and renewal of the MOU with the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles.
  - b. Discussion of the budget that MoP7 in 2022 had decided should be a zero nominal growth budget for the 2023-2025 period, with a one-off allocation from savings in the General Fund. This triennial budget will not be enough to fund the full range of activities at the next AC meeting (**AC14**) normally covered by ACAP. As a result, for the next meeting, there will be a need for additional funds from voluntary contributions or some normally funded activities would not receive funding (e.g., sponsoring the attendance of experts and delegates).
  - c. The conveners of the working groups reporting on the meetings of the prior week. **AC13** endorsed the recommendations from the working groups, but also took further steps to address conservation threats to ACAP species including:
    - To form an ACAP Avian Influenza Expert Group on epidemiology, disease risk assessment and management to further advise ACAP. The group will include invited experts from several countries and be responsible for compiling current information, revising ACAP guidelines, and communicating risks to decision makers and stakeholders within ACAP.
    - That the taxonomic treatment of Buller's *Thalassarche bulleri* and Short-tailed *Phoebastria albatrus* Albatrosses should not change despite additions to the evidence on the taxonomy of the two species.
    - To establish an intersessional correspondence group to review the current RFMO engagement strategy with a view to updating it and develop an updated list of priority actions concerning advocacy, communications, and education.
    - That Parties should hold workshops among their fisheries data specialists, managers, and those responsible for reporting to ACAP to improve data flow to ACAP with support from ACAP, such as through provision of expert advice.
    - To hold an intersessional review of the State-Pressure-Response indicators so they can be better implemented by Parties and provide improved visibility on the use of Best Practice Advice; Range States and APEC member economies are welcome to contribute to the intersessional activities arising from the bycatch data workshop.

PSG members are participating in additional intersessional activities of ACAP including contributing to a document celebrating 20 years of the Agreement; meeting to refine the criteria and scoring for species used to guide which of them may be appropriate for inclusion in Annex I, the list of ACAP species; and planning appropriate recognition of World Albatross Day that occurs each 19 June. The theme for WAD2024 will be "Marine Protected Areas – Safeguarding our Oceans".

Respectfully Submitted by

Beth Flint, PSG "delegate" to ACAP

13 February 2024