

Minister of
Fisheries and Oceans



Ministre des
Pêches et des Océans

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0E6

Mr. Craig S. Harrison, Esq.
Vice Chair for Conservation
Pacific Seabird Group
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USA

MAY 14 2002

Dear Mr. Harrison:

I would like to acknowledge receipt of your letter to my predecessor, the Honourable Herb Dhaliwal, P.C., M.P., regarding the Canadian National Plan to Reduce Incidental Take of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries. There are a number of actions currently in process to address the concerns raised in your letter.

A joint national working group with members from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and the Department of the Environment (DOE) was created in March 2000 to determine the nature and extent of seabird bycatch. The working group has discussed a number of issues including improving field collection information, increasing observer coverage and promoting voluntary measures for fishers to reduce bycatch. The working group is also considering organizing a workshop bringing together seabird and fisheries scientists, fishery managers and industry to assess bycatch levels and determine conservation priorities.

The available information on seabird bycatch in longline fisheries appears to show that bycatch levels are relatively low; however, the historical information is incomplete and the measures noted above should help to improve our knowledge on this important issue. My officials will continue to improve knowledge of longline bycatch of seabirds through observer programs over the coming years and will work with industry to reduce bycatch.

Seabird bycatch in other gear not covered by the FAO initiative such as gillnets could possibly be locally significant and the DFO-CWS working group has identified the need to obtain information in this area.

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Canada

A workshop for member countries of the Committee on Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) took place in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia in April 2000 to summarise information on seabird bycatch collected to date. A technical report has resulted from this workshop (Chardine, J., J. Porter and K. Wohl, 2000. Workshop on Seabird Incidental Catch in the Waters of Arctic Countries: Report and Recommendations. CAFF Technical Report No 7., Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna, Iceland).

In addition, fisheries observer coverage of seabird bycatch has been increased and training for at-sea observers in seabird identification is now provided. Voluntary measures include the use of mitigation devices that have been adopted on halibut vessels in 2001 on the Pacific coast. As of March 15, 2002, the halibut fleet in British Columbia will be required to adopt methods to reduce seabird bycatch. Similar measures can be expected for commercial sablefish and rockfish fisheries on the Pacific coast.

I would like to thank you for bringing this issue to my attention.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Thibault', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert G. Thibault