

Pacific Seabird Group



DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF PACIFIC SEABIRDS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

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August 24, 2009

The Honorable Nick Rahall
United States House of Representatives
2307 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Action on the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)

Dear Representative Rahall:

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), we request your support for, and leadership toward, the United States acceding to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) and the enactment of implementing legislation. ACAP is an international treaty whose fundamental goal is to maintain healthy populations of albatrosses and petrels. It works to achieve these goals through research, monitoring and conservation measures such as reduction of incidental mortality in fisheries and maintenance of habitats.

PSG is an international, non-profit organization that was founded in 1972 to promote the knowledge, study, and conservation of Pacific seabirds. It has a membership drawn from the entire Pacific basin, including Canada, Mexico, Russia, Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Among PSG's members are biologists and scientists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, government officials who manage wildlife refuges and seabird populations, and individuals who are interested in marine conservation. PSG's goals are to enhance the recovery of imperiled species while ensuring that common seabirds retain their healthy status.

ACAP-listed species (28 in total) currently include five of the eight albatross species listed as protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Joining ACAP would not only allow the United States to show its commitment to protecting populations of albatrosses and petrels on a global scale, but would also foster enhanced conservation of species that are protected by other statutes, including the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Endangered Species Act. Since opening for signatures in 2001, eleven countries have become parties to ACAP: Australia, Brazil, Chile, France, New Zealand, Peru, United Kingdom, Spain, Ecuador, South Africa, and Argentina. PSG believes that it is important for the United States to become a party to ACAP as soon as possible.

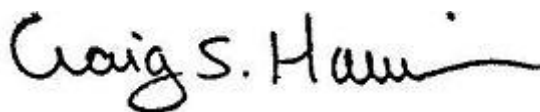
Many albatross species are vulnerable to decimation. Eight albatrosses occur in the waters of the United States and several are endangered. Most petrels in the North Pacific, on the other hand, currently have healthy populations. Albatrosses and petrels have expansive ranges that usually encompass the jurisdiction of many different countries. For example, Laysan, black-footed, and short-tailed albatrosses can be found throughout the North Pacific, with each species using the waters of the California and the West coast, Canada, Russia, Japan, and Mexico. Some of the primary threats to these species are mortality from interactions with fisheries, and predation and habitat loss due to introduction of alien species on their breeding islands.

The United States has been a global leader in protecting seabirds through reducing seabird bycatch and protecting and restoring breeding sites. Joining ACAP provides an important opportunity for our nation to demonstrate its commitment to seabird conservation on a global scale, and to join like-minded nations in conservation efforts that will benefit species where they are at risk outside the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. The provisions of ACAP are consistent with current US activities¹, including efforts at home and abroad. Therefore, joining ACAP would not increase the workloads of those who focus on seabird conservation and research in the United States, nor would it place additional burdens on marine-based industries that are already taking action to avoid bycatch of seabirds (e.g. Alaska's commercial longline fisheries). Rather, ACAP would provide the United States with an additional tool to help other parties undertake complementary work. As a member of ACAP, the United States would directly influence priority and policy setting for ACAP and ensure that lessons learned from efforts implemented in our country are adopted and used elsewhere. U.S. government employees currently attend ACAP meetings only as observers, so their influence within this organization is limited. Ratifying ACAP will give U.S. representatives a stronger voice within ACAP.

In conclusion, some seabird populations are threatened and healthy populations may decline unless serious global measures are taken. ACAP is playing a critical role as the main international mechanism to facilitate this global approach. As chair of the House Resources Committee you are ideally situated to stimulate action on legislation once the Senate takes action.

We respectfully ask that you take the steps necessary to ensure prompt action that leads to the of the US acceding to, and implementing ACAP as soon as possible. If you have questions, please contact Greg Balogh, PSG Chairman and ACAP representative for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska at 907-271-2778 (greg_balogh@fws.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig S. Harrison". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

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

¹ Provisions of ACAP are consistent with measures already required of U.S. federal agencies under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.