



**COMMISSION
EIGHTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**
Electronic Meeting
1 – 7 December 2021

POSITION STATEMENT TO WCPFC18

**WCPFC18-2021-OP05
5 November 2021**

Submitted by Birdlife International

Birdlife International

Position Statement to the Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission 29th November – 7th December 2021, Virtual Meeting.

Birdlife International thanks the WCPFC Secretariat and Members for continuing progress to improve fisheries management in the WCPO despite the ongoing challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognise the difficulties of these circumstances and sincerely appreciate the efforts that have been made to continue work and hold meetings.

The Members 2020 fishing year annual reports highlights that there continues to be significant seabird bycatch due to low compliance of mitigation measures agreed to be implemented by the members under CMM2018-03. The low observer data requirements of the WCPFC are clearly exacerbated by suspensions of the Regional Observer Programme due to COVID-19, an issue which urgently needs to be resolved. We support the continued monitoring and evaluation of these issues as a priority for the WCPFC Secretariat.

Birdlife International re-emphasizes the responsibilities of the WCPFC and its Members to minimise bycatch on populations as established under the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and committed to in member's National Plans of Actions for Seabirds.

Industry are stepping up to address seabird bycatch and demonstrate ecosystem-based sustainable fishing practices.

SeaBOS members committed to new efforts to minimise the impacts on endangered species, with an initial focus on elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) and seabirds. This ambitious commitment is detailed in the first SeaBOS Endangered Species Strategy.

Will the WCPFC step up too?

This position statement highlights addresses ongoing issues of concern for BirdLife International of seabird bycatch in the WCPO, in relation to recommended best practices, and compliance monitoring and data collection on seabird mitigation measures through port state measures, the Regional Observer Program, and electronic means.

Since 2004, the Secretariat, Members, and Observers including BirdLife International, and the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) have submitted 167+ documents on:

- Iterative evidence of the effectiveness of available and adopted seabird bycatch mitigation measures for WCPFC fisheries and,
- Recommendations on achievable improvements to implementation and data collection and reporting.

Yet, seabird bycatch remains concerningly high in WCPFC fisheries, particularly for albatrosses.



BEST PRACTICE:

- **Approximately 90 documents have been submitted to the Scientific Committee (SC), Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC), and the Regular Session of the Commission presenting results of seabird bycatch mitigation trials at-sea, desktop analysis, and risk assessments for seabirds in WCPFC fisheries.**
- Since 2004, more than 40 documents have been submitted to the SC, TCC, and the Regular Session of the Commission providing scientifically evidenced advice and research and recommendations on best practice for seabird mitigation measures. While major improvements to the Seabird CMM-2018-03 have occurred, these measures still do not meet the independent evidence based best practice recommendations of ACAP.

COMPLIANCE MONITORING:

- **Since 2004, at least 83 documents have been submitted to the SC, TCC, and the Regular Session of the Commission relating to monitoring, data collection, the observer program, and reporting related to seabird bycatch, including recommendations.**
- In 2017 at TCC13, recommendations ([WCPFC-TCC13-2017-OP01](#) and [WCPFC-TCC13-2017-OP02](#)) were made to expand data collection fields for transshipment observers, and port state measures to collect data on seabird bycatch mitigation measures, highlighting the minimal impact to observer's workload. This workload would be reduced further with the adoption of electronic reporting. No discussion by Members on these recommendations has been recorded. These recommendations were submitted again in 2020 ([WCPFC-TCC16-2020-OP01](#)).

While some major improvements have been achieved in the WCPFC, there remains 'low-hanging' actions to address the ongoing bycatch of threatened and vulnerable seabird species in WCPFC fisheries. Therefore, BirdLife International calls on the WCPFC to make meaningful progress on the following:

Key Asks:

1. **Adopting ACAP Best Practice Guidelines on seabird bycatch mitigation**
2. **Adopting a CMM for an electronic monitoring program and minimum standards for the use of electronic monitoring and reporting in WCPFC fisheries.**
3. **Increasing observer coverage in long-line fisheries reaching 100% by 2026 using human observers and electronic monitoring to support the ROP in compliance monitoring of CMM2018-03.**

