BirdLife International Statement to the 19th session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee (SC19)

August 2023, Koror, Palau.

BirdLife International thanks the WCPFC Secretariat and Members for their continued efforts to identify improved seabird bycatch mitigation measures. We are highly supportive of these efforts; however, we remain very concerned about the ongoing seabird bycatch in WPCFC fisheries. BirdLife International emphasize that it is critically important for the WCPFC to address the ongoing bycatch of protected seabird species in the WCPO (Western and Central Pacific Ocean) as a duty under the Convention.

BirdLife International emphasizes there are demonstrably effective measures to reduce seabird bycatch in long-line fisheries, and that with fleet-wide implementation and compliance monitoring, seabird bycatch can be dramatically reduced. We look forward to productive discussions in person in Koror, Palau at SC19 on this important issue.

KEY POINTS

- **BirdLife International supports the WCPFC review of CMM2018-03. The improvement of these measures towards meeting ACAP Best Practice guidance for all areas of the WCPFC will make a meaningful impact to reduce seabird bycatch rates.**
- **Observer coverage (human and electronic) of WCPFC long-line fleets must be increased to a minimum of 20% in 2024, increasing to 100% within 5 years.**
- **BirdLife strongly encourages accurate and verified reporting of compliance with CMM2018-03 for all CCMs as the management of the fishery and impacts to ecologically related species relies on accurate data submission to the Commission.**

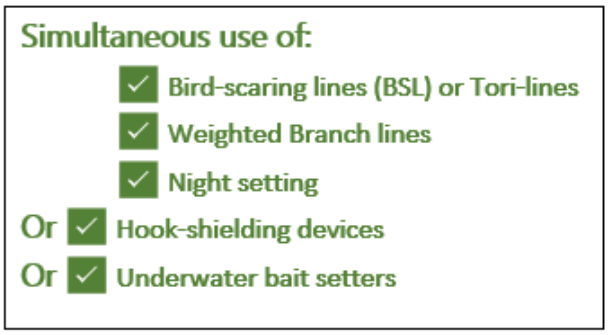
CMM2018-03 SEABIRD BYCATCH MITIGATION REVIEW

Seabird bycatch remains an ongoing problem in the WPCFC fisheries, delaying action to address it is not only driving population declines of seabirds, but also impacting the value and reputation of WCPFC fisheries. The Members of this Commission have an opportunity to lead the world in making Pacific tuna fisheries an ecologically sustainable, high value product. BirdLife International implore members to implement mitigation measures that are currently required under CMM2018-03 in its current form, and to fully support the improvement of these measures following a comprehensive review of CMM2018-03 for all latitudes.

BirdLife International notes the Information Paper SC19-2023/EB-IP-06 submitted by New Zealand presenting a key finding that '*whilst the area north of 30° South forms only a modest portion of the overall distribution of tracked Antipodean albatross, there is overlap with* ***increased pelagic longline fishing effort in the area between 25° and 30° South in the WCPFC area****. Under CMM 2018-03 specifications, only one mitigation measure is required to be used in the area 25° – 30° South, and as such fishing effort poses a higher risk of bycatch*.'

We also highlight document SC19-2023/EB-IP-13 submitted by New Zealand on the distribution and overlap of Flesh-footed Shearwaters in the mid latitudes of the WCPO. This research shows that juvenile birds spend multiple weeks in the equatorial zone. Flesh-footed Shearwaters are at risk of being bycaught, as demonstrated in New Zealand's observer reports and Spatially Explicit Risk Assessment for Seabirds, and the population is declining. BirdLife International also notes that The Republic of Korea reported 25 Wandering Albatrosses caught in the 25°S-23°N latitudes in the 2022 fishing season. Currently, there are no mitigation measures required in this area which needs to be addressed urgently.

Simple, effective, scientifically proven measures are available to reduce seabird bycatch. Details on best practice are provided in Information Paper SC19-EB-IP-21 "*Updated ACAP advice on reducing the bycatch of Albatrosses and Petrels in WCPFC fisheries*", and in the Information Paper SC19-2023/EB-IP-15 "*Mitigation of seabird bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries: Best practice measures, evidence and operational considerations*"



MONITORING AND REPORTING

BirdLife emphasizes again that the ongoing low levels of observer coverage are undermining the integrity of the WPCFC to demonstrate that Members are fulfilling their obligations. At 5% - the current observer coverage requirement will not produce the quality or quantity of data necessary to properly manage the fishery and its impacts to non-target species. Indeed, the probability of detecting statistically rare events, such as interactions with seabirds is hampered by ongoing low observer coverage. BirdLife has repeatedly emphasized that there is a divide between Members that demonstrate ability to meet the obligations for seabird bycatch mitigation under CMM 2018-03, and those that do not (Table 1).

We appreciate and acknowledge efforts made by Members to improve reporting on seabird mitigation measures; however, note that Members' 2022 fishing year annual reports again highlight worryingly low levels, and poor spatial representation of observer coverage. It is impossible to verify the implementation of CMM2018-03 in the absence of observer coverage, that is, any reported compliance with the measure by Members is spurious at best. We note that while some Members have been able to maintain or increase observer coverage, several have not (Tables 1-4).

This lack of data collection highlights the pressing need for the observer programme to be supplemented with electronic monitoring, particularly when human observation is disrupted. This would ensure WCPFC requirements are met, including those related to ERS.

BirdLife International highlights to Members the Ecosystems and Bycatch Theme Information Paper **SC19-EB-IP-08** *Global Prevalence of setting longlines at dawn highlights bycatch risk for threatened albatross*. This research demonstrates that verifying reported data from commercial fisheries where cameras and other sensors to detect fishing operations is not present is increasingly possible. Comparing the findings with onboard observer data on night setting, the study found a discrepancy

between reported and actual night setting. The reported amount of night setting was much higher than revealed by AIS analysis. Although all Members are supposed to submit data, public documents published by the WCPFC revealed that, according to onboard observers, only three Members, the Fishing Entity of Taiwan, Japan, and New Zealand complied.

The Fishing Entity of Taiwan reported that 57–95 % of its observed fishing effort from 2017 to 2020 was conducted using night setting, i.e., 57–95 % of hooks were set at night. However, this study suggests that only 1.4–15 % of sets were done entirely at night, and only about 3–47 % of sets overlapped more with night than daytime. For Japan in 2019 and 2020 (the years that data are reported for South of 30°S), night setting was reported on 33 % and 53 % of hooks respectively, while this study shows only 1 % and 7 % of sets were entirely at night. However, this discrepancy could be explained by the fact that Japanese vessels report using a combination of bird-scaring lines and night-setting up until 1 h before dawn, before switching to a combination of bird-scaring lines and weighted lines mid-set. Some Member States do have higher rates of complete night setting, such as New Zealand, who set 39–63 % of sets entirely at night in 2017–2018; their observer data, however, showed much higher night setting rates for the same period, 93–100 %.

BirdLife International once again reiterates the urgent need for increased observer coverage using human observers and electronic monitoring to improve the accuracy and confidence in estimates of seabird bycatch rates in WCPFC fisheries, and ultimately to demonstrate progress toward responsibilities under the UN Fish Stocks Agreement.

BirdLife International | Pacific Secretariat
10 McGregor Rd | GPO Box 18332 | Suva | Fiji
Web www.BirdLife.org

Stephanie Borrelle, PhD (she/her)
Marine & Pacific Regional Coordinator
Ko te kaiwhakaahaere ā-Rohe o Te Moananui-ā-Kiwa
Phone +(64)211362531
Email Stephanie.Borrelle@BirdLife.org

BirdLife INTERNATIONAL

Partnership for nature and people

BirdLife INTERNATIONAL | Partnership for nature and people

Table 1: Bycatch mitigation compliance in 2018 -2022. Years and areas where the CCM failed to meet the 5% observer coverage, thus where reported interactions with seabirds are unreliable, are highlighted in red. The fishing year 2022 is shaded in green. *Very high bycatch rates (>0.05) and where there was no observer coverage are highlighted in yellow.*

Country	Year	Observed effort (% of total hooks)	Has mitigation use been reported according to area fished?	South of 30°S (% observed effort using 2/3 mitigation measures)	25°S – 30°S (% observed effort using 1/2 mitigation measures)	North of 23°N (% observed effort using 2/3 mitigation measures)	Total observed birds caught
Australia	2018	11.2 (south of 30° S) 10.2 (30°S-25°S) 11.2 (25°S-23°N)	No	100		N/A	14
	2019	12.1 (south of 30° S) 12 (30°S-25°S) 10.9 (25°S-23°N)	No	100		N/A	11
	2020	9.8 (south of 30° S) 10.2 (30°S-25°S) 9.8 (25°S-23°N)	No	100		N/A	11
	2021	9.9 (south of 30° S) 10.2 (30°S-25°S) 9.5 (25°S-23°N)	No	100		N/A	10
	2022	9.7 (south of 30° S) 10.2 (30°S-25°S) 10 (25°S-23°N)	**No**	**100**		**N/A**	**10**
China	2018	3.48 (south of 30° S) 4.59 (23°N-30°S) 15.15 (north of 23° N)	Mitigation not reported	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	7
	2019	0 (south of 30° S) 6.3 (23°N-30°S) 15.15 (north of 23° N)	Mitigation not reported	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	6
	2020	8.97 (south of 30° S) 9.19 (23°N-30°S) 0 (north of 23° N)	Yes	100	100	100	6
	2021	9.42 (south of 30° S) 7.06 (23°N-30°S) 0 (north of 23° N)	Yes	100	100	100	0

	2022	**39.33 (south of 30° S) 0 (23°N-30°S) 6.41 (north of 23° N)**	**Yes**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**0**
Chinese Taipei	2018	3.6 (south of 30° S) 5.1 (30°S-25°S) 6.4 (north of 23° N)	Yes	93.6	100	87.6	14
	2019	6 (south of 30° S) 12.5 (30°S-25°S) 2.6 (north of 23° N)	Yes	70	91.1†	87.5	21
	2020	6.5 (south of 30° S) 9.8 (30°S-25°S) 5.3 (north of 23° N)	Yes	59.1	100	97	46
	2021	6.3 (south of 30° S) 6.6 (30°S-25°S) 5.2 (north of 23° N)	Yes	90	100	98.7	10
	2022	**10.7 (south of 30° S) 2.6 (30°S-25°S) 5.3 (north of 23° N)**	**Yes**	**93.5**	**100**	**100**	**95**
Japan* **Vessels >20GRT/<20GRT**	2018§	2.4 / NA (south of 30° S) 4.0 / 3.1 (30°S-23°N) 2.8/ 1.7 (north of 23° N)	No (3.7% complaint across all areas)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	160
	2019§	17.9 / NA (south of 30° S) 4.0 / NA (30°S-25°S) 4.0 / 3.9 (25°S-23°N) 3. 4 / 3.2 (north of 23° N)	Yes	42	6.4	74.8	1669
	2020	5.5 / NA (south of 30° S) 0 / NA (30°S-25°S) 0 / 0.3 (25°S-23°N) 0 / 0.1 (north of 23° N)	Yes	76.4	100	0.3	43
	2021	0 / NA (south of 30° S) 0.4 / NA (30°S-25°S) 0.4 / 0 (25°S-23°N) 0 / 0 (north of 23° N)	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	**0 / NA (south of 30° S) 0 / NA (30°S-25°S)**	**Yes**	**Unknown**	**Unknown**	**Unknown**	**Unknown**

		0 / 0 (25˚S-23˚N) 0 / 0 (north of 23 º N)					
New Zealand	2018	13.1 (south of 30 º S)	Yes	95	N/A	N/A	98
	2019	8.4 (south of 30 º S)	Yes	100	N/A	N/A	56
	2020	9.9 (south of 30 º S)	Yes	97.8	N/A	N/A	24
	2021	11.7 (south of 30 º S)	Yes	93	N/A	N/A	53
	2022	5.4 (south of 30 º S)	**Yes**	**93**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**60**
USA*	2018	20.4 (across all areas)	Combined	N/A	100		249
	2019	21.03 (across all areas)	Combined	N/A	100		226
	2020	15.87 (across all areas)	Combined	N/A	100		188
	2021	19.12 (across all areas)	Combined	N/A	100		184
	2022	**21.68 (across all areas)**	**Combined**	**N/A**	**100**		**209**

* Reports effort north of 23° N and 23° N – 30° S areas combined, only reported for Hawai'i fleet.

† Total reporting only equalled 91.1% of observed effort

§ Japan report no mitigation use in the 25˚N – 30˚S area because bycatch mitigation requirements for this area came into force in January 2020 under CMM 2018-03.

BirdLife INTERNATIONAL | Partnership for nature and people

Table 2. Effort observed and reported seabird captures in 2018 - 2022 [South of 30˚S]. Entries in red do not meet WCPCF observer coverage requirements for spatial representation. *Very high bycatch rates (>0.05) and where there was no observer coverage are highlighted in yellow.*

Country	*Fishing effort*				*Observed seabirds hooked*	
	Year	Number of vessels	Number of hooks ('000s)	% hooks observed	Capture number	Capture rate (birds/1000 hooks)
Australia	2018	37	3,084	11.2	8	0.023
	2019	33	2,537	12.1	8	0.026
	2020	30	1,721	9.8	9	0.005
	2021	30	1,890	9.9	7	0.004
	2022	**31**	**2,071**	**9.7**	**3**	**0.015**
China	2018	19	5,025	3.48	0	0
	2019	22	2,312	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2020	26	3,121	9.42	1	0.003
	2021	23	6,511	8.97	0	0
	2022	**52**	**2,286**	**39.33**	**0**	**0**
Chinese Taipei	2018	44	6,508	3.6	0	0
	2019	41	9,577	6	7	0.013
	2020	58	10,172	6.5	4	0.008
	2021	38	4,852	6.3	1	0.003
	2022†	**21†**	**5,394†**	**10.7†**	**3†**	**0.005†**
Japan (vessels > 20 GRT)	2018	27	7,003	2.4*	37	0.217
	2019	27	5,388	17.9	1140	1.185
	2020	21	3,705	5.5	13	0.063
	2021	23	4,332	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	**22**	**2,978**	**0**	**Unknown**	**Unknown**
New Zealand	2018	33	2,233	13.1	98	0.336
	2019	28	1,978	8.4	56	0.339
	2020	28	1,949	9.9	24	0.124
	2021	28	1,535	11.7	53	0.296
	2022	**22**	**1,271**	**5.4**	**60**	**0.871**

*Observer coverage may be low due to some data having been removed.

† Preliminary data

Table 3. Effort observed and reported seabird captures 2018- 2022 [between 25˚S - 30˚S]. Entries in red do not meet WCPCF observer coverage requirements for spatial representation. *Very high bycatch rates (>0.05) and where there was no observer coverage are highlighted in yellow.*

Country	*Fishing effort*					
	Year	Number of vessels	Number of hooks ('000s)	% hooks observed	Capture number	Capture rate (birds/1000 hooks)
Australia	2018	27	2,917	10.2	5	0.017
	2019	26	3,264	12.0	3	0.008
	2020	22	3,990	10.2	2	0.005
	2021	21	2,607	10.2	1	0.004
	2022	**22**	**2,583**	**9.3**	**6**	**0.025**
China*	2018	335	140,011	4.59	1	0.00015
	2019	339	159,311	6.3	6	0.0006
	2020	349	152,900	7.06	5	0.00046
	2021	308	140,511	9.19	0	0
	2022	**263**	**122,494**	**6.41**	**0**	**0**

Chinese Taipei	2018	61	11,982	5.1	5	0.008
	2019	45	6,637	12.5	11	0.013
	2020	99	15,393	9.8	0	0
	2021	38	4,672	6.6	1	0.003
	2022	**27**	**3,776**	**2.6**	**0**	**0**
Japan (Vessels > 20GRT)	2018*	154	20,655	3.1	7	0.011
	2019	9	844	4.0	4	0.005
	2020	14	1,563	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2021	12	971	0.4	0	0
	2022	**9**	**711**	**0**	**Unknown**	**Unknown**
Japan (Vessels < 20GRT) 23˚N – 25˚S only	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2019	148	20,580	3.9	1	0.001
	2020	130	16,083	0.3	2	0.039
	2021	114	18,193	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	**121**	**12,416**	**0**	**Unknown**	**Unknown**

* Combined data for 23˚N – 25˚S and 25˚S – 30˚S

† Preliminary data

Table 4. Effort observed and reported seabird captures in 2018 - 2021[North of 23˚N]. *Very high bycatch rates (>0.05) and where there was no observer coverage are highlighted in yellow.*

Country	*Fishing effort*				*Observed seabirds bycaught*	
	Year	Number of vessels	Number of hooks ('000s)	% of hooks observed	Capture number	Capture rate (birds/1000 hooks)
China	2018	10	779	15.15	6	0.05
	2019	9	144	8.33	0	0
	2020	10	745	0	0	0
	2021	17	959	0	unknown	unknown
	2022	**9**	**183**	**0**	**unknown**	**unknown**
Chinese Taipei	2018	521	26,173	6.4	5	0.003
	2019	603	31,792	2.6	2	0.002
	2020	205	28,843	5.3	46	0.030
	2021	109	16,724	5.2	59	0.068
	2022	**122**	**18,134**	**5.3**	**88**	**0.092**
Japan (Vessels > 20GRT)	2018	36	11,842	2.8	61	0.186
	2019	36	11,239	3.4	83	0.219
	2020	42	13,860	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2021	37	13,590	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	**33**	**10,678**	**0**	**Unknown**	**Unknown**
Japan (Vessels < 20GRT)	2018	209	50,681	1.7	55	0.064
	2019	208	49,639	3.2	437	0.278
	2020	215	57,123	0.1	28	0.703
	2021	186	57,702	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	**225**	**43,375**	**0**	**Unknown**	**Unknown**
USA* (Hawai'i only)	2018	142	54,482	20.40	249	0.02
	2019	146	63,350	21.03	226	0.02
	2020	143	58,763	15.87	188	0.02
	2021	143	64,985	19.12	184	0.01
	2022	**143**	**63,170**	**21.68**	**209**	**0.02**

* Reports effort north of 23° N and 23° N – 30° S areas combined.

† Preliminary data