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Review of Non-Target and Associated or Dependent Species in the WCPO: Seabirds

WCPFC22-2025-28a
29 October 2025

Submitted by the Secretariat

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide summary information to support the Commission's review of the performance of its current conservation and management measures (CMMs) on seabirds: CMM 2018-03 in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). Relevant recommendations to the Commission from subsidiary body meetings (SC21 and TCC21) in 2025 are included in this paper and contained in the relevant subsidiary body meeting reports.

Stock Status and Scientific Research

2. The WCPFC does not currently conduct stock assessments for seabirds within the WCPFC framework. However, the Scientific Committee has adopted a structured approach that rotates the review of available data on NTADS through the Ecosystem and Bycatch Mitigation (EB) Theme.[1] This process is supported by research conducted by CCMs and observers. At SC21, studies by New Zealand (SC21-EB-WP-07) and Japan (SC21-EB-WP-08) contributed to the ongoing review of the seabird measure (CMM 2018-03), providing updated analyses on bycatch risks and technical evaluations of mitigation measures. Based on this work, SC21 supported a phased approach to revising the measure, focusing on improving effectiveness, practicality, and safety, and endorsed continued intersessional work to develop minimum standards and adaptable technical guidelines. TCC21 noted the proposal's conservation intent and alignment with existing measures, while highlighting the need for further review of practicality, safety, and cost considerations before WCPFC22.

Management Framework

3. The current conservation and management measure (CMM) for seabirds is contained in **CMM 2018-03**[2] and **suppl_CMM 2018-03**[3].

[1] SC20 Summary Report, para 767
[2] Conservation and Management Measure to mitigate the impact of fishing for highly migratory fish stocks on seabirds
[3] Safe Handling and release Guidelines for Seabirds

4. The Commission's efforts to mitigate seabird bycatch began in 2004, leading to the adoption of successive measures, with CMM 2018-03 currently in force. The measure establishes area- and risk-based mitigation requirements for longline fisheries across the Convention Area.

5. In 2024, the Commission at WCPFC21[4] tasked:

   a. New Zealand to lead a review of the seabird measure

   b. SC21 and TCC21 to provide advice on the supporting material provided by CCMs and the SSP

   c. WCPFC22 to consider the proposal provided by New Zealand, as well as advice from SC21 and TC21.

6. In 2025, New Zealand continued to lead an informal the review of the seabird measure and provided an update to SC21 in SC21-EB-WP-07. The review focused on ensuring effective mitigation methods are applied where bycatch risk to vulnerable seabirds is highest, particularly for albatrosses and petrels. The paper proposed a staged revision of CMM 2018-03, beginning with Southern Hemisphere areas where the risk is greatest. Recommendations propose requiring the combined use of two or three mitigation measures—tori lines, branch-line weighting, and night setting—or hook-shielding devices as a stand-alone option, alongside updated branch-line weighting specifications.

7. SC21 supported a phased approach to revising seabird mitigation measures, focusing on the Southern Hemisphere and a combined-measure framework. Members emphasised the importance of balancing effectiveness, practicality, and safety, while noting ongoing concerns about data, analytical methods, and the use of heavier branch-line weights. The Committee also endorsed developing a two-tiered framework that distinguishes minimum compliance standards from adaptable technical guidelines and agreed to continue intersessional work to refine these for TCC21 consideration.

8. TCC21 reviewed the proposal from New Zealand (TCC21-2025-DP09_Rev1) and noted SC21's request to consider practicality issues of combined mitigation measures south of 25°S. TCC21 acknowledged the proposal's conservation intent and alignment with existing requirements but also raised similar concerns to SC21 as to the practicality, safety, and cost of implementing multiple measures, particularly heavier weights and hook-shielding devices. While some CCMs supported stronger, more consistent seabird mitigation measures, other CCMs called for further technical review and refinement based on scientific evidence and operational feasibility before WCPFC22.

Table 1. Summary table of *WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) 2018-03 on Seabirds*

Area of Focus	Geographic Area	Applicability	Mitigation Measures Required	Reporting & Review
South of 30°S	High seabird interaction risk zone	All longline vessels	Must use **at least two** of the following: (1) weighted branch lines, (2) night setting, (3) tori lines; *or* use **hook-shielding devices**	CCMs report required measures and technical specs in Annual Report Part 2; review within 3 years based on scientific info

[4] WCPFC21 Summary Report, para 552

Table 1. Summary table of *WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) 2018-03 on Seabirds*				
Area of Focus	**Geographic Area**	**Applicability**	**Mitigation Measures Required**	**Reporting & Review**
25°S – 30°S	Moderate risk zone	All longline vessels	Must use **one** of: (1) weighted branch lines, (2) tori lines, (3) hook-shielding devices	Effective from **1 Jan 2020**; exemptions for **French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Tonga, Cook Islands, Fiji** due to low seabird risk; encouraged to collect interaction data
North of 23°N	High seabird interaction zone	- **Large-scale LL vessels (≥24m):** use ≥2 measures (≥1 from Column A) - **Small-scale LL (<24m):** use ≥1 from Column A	**Column A:** side setting w/ bird curtain + weighted branch lines, night setting, tori line, weighted branch lines, hook-shielding devices **Column B:** tori line, blue-dyed bait, deep setting line shooter, management of offal discharge	Include in Annual Report Part 2 (mitigation used) and Part 1 (observed seabird interactions)
Between 25°S and 23°N	Lower risk zone	Encouraged only	Use one or more measures from Table 1 where necessary	Encourage research and data collection on seabird bycatch
Research and Data Collection	All areas	CCMs operating south of 25°S or north of 23°N	Report annually on mitigation measures, technical specs, and seabird interaction data	SC and TCC to annually review effectiveness of measures and seabird interaction data
Observer & Monitoring Requirements	Convention Area	All CCMs	Provide observer data and seabird interaction records	Use reporting templates in **Annex 2** (effort, bycatch, mitigation use, species-specific data)
Replacement & Review	—	—	Replaces **CMM 2017-06**	Review by SC after 3 years

Data Collection Efforts and Monitoring for Seabirds

9. Under CMM 2018-03, the WCPFC requires longline vessels operating north of 23°N or south of 25°S to implement specific seabird bycatch mitigation measures, including combinations of tori lines, branch-line weighting, night setting, or hook-shielding devices. Members are obligated under paragraph 08 of the CMM to report annually on the mitigation measures applied and their technical specifications, with subsequent reports noting any changes. Aggregated summary data from observers is available each year in the Annual Report on the Regional Observer Programme.[5] This supplements CCM's self-reported information available through CMM daily logbook reporting requirements (CMM 2022-06 paragraph 2) as well as required reporting in Annual Report Part 1 (AR Pt1) on interactions with seabirds during fishing operations (CMM 2018-03 paragraph 13).

10. In 2024, summary observer data, shows 33% of seabirds landed or interacted with during longline trips were released alive with the majority of interactions occurring North of 23° North, which is consistent with known areas of high rates of interaction. Two species (Laysan albatross and black-footed albatross) were the most prevalent species recorded. No interactions with seabirds were reported from purse seine fisheries.

Compliance History

11. The seabird measure (CMM 2018-03) has been periodically reviewed under the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) since 2013. The 2024 Final Compliance Monitoring Report (fCMR) covering 2023 activities recorded high levels of compliance, with all applicable CCMs found compliant with paragraphs 01, 02, and 06 (implementation of mitigation measures), and paragraph 08 (reporting of mitigation measures and technical specifications). This was the first time these obligations had been assessed with Audit Points available to support the review, and the first assessment of paragraph 08 since 2016. No instances of non-compliance were recorded, although assessments for one CCM remained as "pending" for each section. These results demonstrate consistent implementation of mitigation requirements, based on available data and information for reviewing compliance by CCMs with obligations.

Table 2. 2024 Final Compliance Monitoring Report (fCMR) for CMM 2018-03 covering 2023 activities for the seabird CMM

CMM 2018-03	Para. 01, 02, 06	Para. 08
Compliant	11	8
Non-compliant	0	0
Not applicable	28	31
Pending	1	1

[5] The 2025 Annual Report on the Regional Observer Programme (for 2024) is available on the TCC21 meeting page.

Recommendations and Next Steps

12. The outcomes and recommendations from SC21 and TCC21 related to seabirds are listed below for consideration, support, endorsement and/or approval at WCPFC22:

Seabirds: SC21 Outcomes and Recommendations *(Reference: para. 194-196, SC21 Outcomes Document)*

- SC21 requested that TCC21 consider further any practicality issues related to the use of combined mitigation measures south of 25° South.
- SC21 endorsed the approach to develop a two-tiered structure that separates minimum, compliance-based standards from adaptable technical guidelines in relation to the specification of tori lines for large vessels in the Southern Hemisphere (Paragraph 1a of CMM 2018-03 Annex 1). Such guidelines would enable the improvement of this seabird bycatch mitigation practice and enhance operational flexibility.
- SC21 requested interested CCMs and Observers to work intersessionally to present an updated draft to TCC21 based on a draft set of technical guidelines discussed during ISG-04 (**Attachment Y**).

Seabirds: TCC21 Outcomes and Recommendations *(Reference: para. 85-87, TCC21 Outcomes Document)*

- TCC21 thanked New Zealand for continuing to lead the review of the seabird measure (CMM 201803) as tasked by WCPFC21 (para 552 (a)) and for the delegation paper (TCC21-2025-DP09_Rev01).
- TCC21 noted a range of views on these recommendations and noted that New Zealand will engage further with CCMs on the strengthening of seabird mitigations, with a view to WCPFC22 considering improvements to the seabird measure.
- TCC21 thanked Japan for its delegation paper on revised tori-line specifications for large longline vessels in the South Pacific under CMM 2018-03 (TCC21-2025-DP04_Rev01) and encouraged CCMs to continue discussions with Japan on its proposal prior to WCPFC22 for consideration at WCPFC22.

Attachment Y

The Commission for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean
TWENTY-FIRST REGULAR SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Nuku'alofa, Tonga
13–21 August 2025

Report from ISG-04
Proposed amendments of tori-line specs for large vessels in the SPO

1. Minimum Standard

The minimum standards are necessary to ensure the essential elements for seabird bycatch mitigation.

- Securing a sufficiently long aerial section to provide an effective spatial deterrent
- Ensuring the presence of visible and stable streamers in the aerial section
- Casting baited hooks within the area protected by the tori-line(s)

Spec	Current measure	Suggested revision
Aerial extent	≧100m	Same text as current measure
Streamer type	Mix of long and short	Same text as current measure
Streamer length	Long: sufficient length to sea surface Short: >1m	**"For short streamers, add the requirement that they must be at least 1 meter long or reach the water surface."**
Streamer interval	Long: <5m Short: <1m	Same text as current measure
Attachment method	Swivels (MUST)	**"Make the streamer so that it does not get tangled in the main line."**
Streamer area	N/A	**"Streamers are to be attached along the mainline from behind the stern to the point where the mainline enters the water."**
Pole placement	Windward side of sinking bait	Same text as current measure
Number of tori-lines	1 or 2	**"Deploy at least 1 tori line. If two tori-lines are deployed, both tori lines shall be deployed simultaneously, one on each side of the line being set. "**
Operational practice	N/A	**"During line setting, baited hooks must be landed close to the tori-line coverage area cast it should be avoided areas of propeller turbulence."**
Pole height	≧7m	Same text as current measure

2. Technical Guideline

The guidelines take into account environmental and operational variables such as weather conditions, setting speed and ship size, all of which influence tori line performance and design in protecting baits from birds. Tori line design and use may change to take account of these variables provided that line performance is not compromised.

Spec	Current measure	Suggested revision
Mainline length	≧200m	**To achieve this aerial extent the tori line shall have a total length of 200m**
Mainline material	N/A	**・ It is effective to use different materials for the main line above water and below water.** **・ For the aerial section, a lightweight material with a braided rope that is easy to insert a streamer is desirable.** **・ For the underwater section, a material that floats in water is preferrable to reduce entanglement with fishing gear, and a rope with a rough texture to provide towing power is preferrable too.** **・ It is better not to use nylon monofilament for the main line due to low durability and coiling problem.**
Towing device	N/A	**・ The towing object (e.g. triangular cone) attached to the end of the main line can generate strong drag power to create sufficient aerial extent, but this increases the risk of entanglement with fishing gear. It is necessary to adjust the size and shape based on actual operational circumstance.** **・ It is also effective to insert dozens of 20-30 cm sturdy packing strap near the end of the main line as an alternative to the towing object.**
Streamer material	N/A	**・ Plastic or vinyl tubes, or nylon cords are preferred for long streamers. Avoid materials that tear easily.** **・ Light weight plastic packing straps or ribbon-like materials are preferred for short streamers.**
Streamer color	Brightly coloured	**Low-visible colours, such as blue and black, should be avoided as streamer colors.**
Attachment method	Swivels (MUST)	**・ The use of metal swivels as mounting hardware should be avoided, as they add extra weight to the line and make it difficult to achieve sufficient aerial extent.** **・ Plastic joints or pulleys, or long streamers made of relatively rigid materials, can be used to prevent entanglement.**
Number of tori-lines	1 or 2	**Vessels are encouraged to use a second tori line at times of high bird abundance or activity.**

Pole height	≧7m	**Note that raising the tori-line attachment position may require lengthening the total line length or adding an additional towing device to ensure sufficient aerial extent.**
Operational practice	N/A	**A spare tori-line should be prepared, and that when using a bait-casting machine, the landing position should be adjusted in advance.**