SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
TWENTY-SECOND REGULAR SESSION
11-19 August 2026
Apia, Samoa (Hybrid)

BirdLife International Statement to the SC22

WCPFC-SC22-2026-OP01_Rev01
21 July 2026

Submitted by BirdLife International

BirdLife International Statement to the 22nd session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee (SC22)

August 11th-19th, 2026, Apia, Samoa

BirdLife International thanks the WCPFC Secretariat for the preparations for SC22 and our hosts, Samoa for the venue and local arrangements. We recognize the continued efforts of Members to improve the management of highly migratory fish stocks and their impacts on seabirds and marine ecosystems.

The Ongoing Seabird Conservation Crisis

The conservation status of seabirds in the WCPFC Convention Area remains critical. Populations of Gibson's Albatross and Southern Buller's Albatross continue to experience significant long-term declines. Most urgently, the Antipodean Albatross faces a 6% annual decline and a risk of global extinction by 2070 if current bycatch levels in pelagic longline fisheries are not addressed. New tracking data for the Black-footed Albatross (includes 84% of the global breeding population), confirms that 97% of fisheries overlap with this species occurs north of 23°N, primarily within the WCPFC Convention Area (WCPFC-SC22-2026-EB-IP16). The principal hotspot is the northwest Pacific, where the Japanese offshore longline fleet operates. Because 93% of this overlap occurs on the high seas, the effectiveness of WCPFC's mitigation measures is the primary determinant of this species' survival.

BirdLife is very concerned with the bycatch situation north of 23°N, as Members operating in this area are reporting very high bycatch rates (>0.05 birds/1000 hooks), with combined raised mortalities of >37,000 birds over the last 5 years (Table 4). We emphasize the urgent need for the Scientific Committee to recommend changes to CMM2025-05 to address the deficiencies in the mitigation measures required for north of 23°N and ensure that observer coverage meets the *minimum* of 5% in this area, as many Members are failing to reach this threshold (Table 4).

Progress in Reporting and Observer Coverage

BirdLife International is encouraged by the substantial improvements in data reporting and observer coverage demonstrated by several Members in 2025:

- **Observer Coverage via Electronic Monitoring (EM):** We congratulate New Zealand on achieving near-total transparency, with 91.8% coverage south of 30°S of all longline hooks monitored by cameras in 2025 (Tables 1 & 2). We appreciate the accurate reporting and efforts to address seabird bycatch in their fishery and anticipate further reductions in seabird mortality with the implementation of Best Practice seabird mitigation (3/3 measures).
- Similarly, we congratulate China for achieving the drastic increase in observer coverage to <90% south of 30°S in 2025 (Tables 1 & 2) and encourage this Member to share their process for implementing this rate so rapidly.
- **Meeting and Exceeding Standards:** In addition, we commend Members for maintaining or increasing observer coverage levels south of 30°S, a high-risk area for seabirds, above the WCPFC 5% minimum standard including Japan (13.1%), Australia (9%), Chinese Taipei (6.2%). For achieving or exceeding observer coverage >5% in fisheries north of 23°N, we commend Vanuatu (20.6%), the United States (12.4%), and Japan (>20GRT; 5.48%) (Tables 1 & 2).

- **Mitigation use Reporting:** We thank Vanuatu for providing seabird bycatch data using the reporting template in CMM2020-05 (Tables 1-4). While some detail has been provided on mitigation use by spatial area, we encourage the United States and Australia to utilise the reporting templates in CMM2025-05 in future. BirdLife thanks Chinese Taipei for integrating the reporting of mitigation measures by area to match the updated CMM2025-05 (Table 13 in their Annual Report).
- **Standardised Reporting:** We welcome the implementation of the new SciData web-portal, which has streamlined scientific data submissions and improved the transparency and accountability of catch and effort reporting.

The improvement in reporting provides increased trust in assessing the impact of WCPFC fisheries on seabird populations. Simultaneously, we emphasize the importance of continuing efforts to improve verification of monitoring and compliance with seabird bycatch mitigation measures.

Monitoring and Compliance

While reporting has improved, the 5% minimum observer requirement for longline fisheries remains insufficient to accurately track rare interaction events with seabirds. BirdLife International supports the U.S. proposal to establish a WCPFC Electronic Monitoring Program. However, given that many Members are already exceeding 10%, BirdLife recommends that the requirement be for **20% EM review or human coverage by 2028 and 50% by 2029**. Increased independent monitoring is the only way to verify the efficacy of mitigation measures and provide the high-quality data necessary for ecosystem-based management.

Strengthening Seabird Bycatch Mitigation Measures (CMM 2025-05)

Based on the best available science, BirdLife International urges the Scientific Committee to endorse the following updates to seabird mitigation requirements:

- **Southern Hemisphere (South of 25°S):** We support the transition to the simultaneous use of three measures (tori lines, branch line weighting, and night setting) or the standalone use of hook-shielding devices. New Zealand has already demonstrated the feasibility of this "best practice" approach, which can yield a 61% improvement in mitigation performance. Following the implementation of these measures, we expect to see a significant decline in reported seabird bycatch.
- **Northern Hemisphere (North of 23°N):** Given that nearly all Black-footed Albatross overlap occurs in this region, the northern provisions of CMM 2025-05 must be revised. We recommend aligning requirements with ACAP best-practice advice, including the removal of measures like blue-dyed bait, for which there is limited evidence of effectiveness.
- **Branch Line Weighting:** We urge the adoption of technical specifications (e.g., 40g weights within 0.5m of the hook) that achieve a rapid sink rate of 0.5m/s, which can reduce bycatch by 52% without affecting target catch rates.

The improvements in reporting noted this year prove that Members can meet high standards of transparency. We now urge the Commission to apply this same commitment to the implementation of best-practice mitigation to solve the seabird bycatch crisis.

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Table 1: Bycatch mitigation compliance in 2018 -2023. 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.

Member	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)
Australia	2021	9.0 (south of 30° S)	No	100		
		10.2 (30˚S-25˚S)			NA	
	2022	9.6 (south of 30° S)	No	100		
		10.2 (30˚S-25˚S)				
	2023	9.3 (south of 30° S)	No	100		
		9.4 (30˚S-25˚S)				
	2024	9.8 (south of 30° S)	No	100		
		9.4 (30˚S-25˚S)				
	2025	**8.9 (south of 30° S)**	**No**	**100**		
		7.8 (30˚S-25˚S)				
China	2021	9.42 (south of 30° S)	Yes	100		
		7.06 (23˚N-30˚S)			100	
		0 (north of 23° N)	Yes			100
	2022	39.33 (south of 30° S)		100		
		0 (23˚N-30˚S)	Yes		100	
		6.41 (north of 23° N)				100
	2023	12.94 (south of 30° S)	Yes	100		
		10.28 (23˚N-30˚S)			100	
	2024	40.11 (south of 30° S)	Yes	100		
		6.33 (23˚N-30˚S)			100	
	2025	**90.52 (south of 30° S)**	**Yes**	**100**		
		9.38 (23˚N-30˚S)			**100**	
Chinese Taipei	2021	6.3 (south of 30° S)	Yes	90		
		6.6 (30˚S-25˚S)			100	

		5.2 (north of 23° N)				98.7
	2022	10.7 (south of 30° S)	Yes	93.5		
		4.9 (30˚S-25˚S)			100	
		6.4 (north of 23° N)				100
	2023	7.3 (south of 30° S)	Yes	71.3		
		4.6 (30˚S-25˚S)			4.4	
		0.8 (north of 23° N)				0.5
	2024	7.5 (south of 30° S)	Yes	100		
		8.3 (30˚S-25˚S)			100	
		4.0 (north of 23° N)				72.7
	2025	**6.2 (south of 30° S)**	**Yes**	**100**		
		5.5 (30˚S-25˚S)			**100**	
		3.0 (north of 23° N)				**100**
Japan (>20GRT/ <20GRT)	2021	0 / NA (south of 30° S)	Yes	NA		
		0.4 / NA (30˚S-25˚S)			NA	
		0 / 0 (north of 23° N)				NA
	2022	0 / NA (south of 30° S)	Yes	NA		
		0 / NA (30˚S-25˚S)			NA	
		0 / 0 (north of 23° N)				NA
	2023	13.4 / NA (south of 30° S)	Yes	76.9		
		14.9 / NA (30˚S-25˚S)			69.6	
		5.3 / 2.2 (north of 23° N)				87
	2024	16.8 / NA (south of 30° S)	Yes	96.07		
		26.1 / NA (30˚S-25˚S)			92.21	
		2.0 / 2.0 (north of 23° N)				94.2
	2025	**16.8 / NA (south of 30° S)**	**Yes**	**95.2**		
		26.1 / NA (30˚S-25˚S)			**100**	
		2.0 / 2.0 (north of 23° N)				**97.6**
New Zealand	2021	11.7 (south of 30° S)	Yes	93		
	2022	5.4 (south of 30° S)	Yes	93		
	2023	3.2 (south of 30° S)	Yes	100		
	2024	88.2 (south of 30° S)	Yes	100		

	2025	**91.8 (south of 30° S)**	**Yes**	**100**		
United States*	2021	21.9 (north of 23° N)	Yes			
	2022	25.2 (north of 23° N)	Yes			
	2023	19.4 (north of 23° N)	Yes			
	2024	17.2 (north of 23° N)	Yes			
	2025	**12.4 (north of 23° N)**	**Yes**			**99**
Vanuatu	2023	1.00 (across all areas)	No	NA	NA	NA
	2024	6.00 (across all areas)	Yes	100	100	
	2025	0 (south of 30° S)	**Yes**	**0**		
		0 (30˚S-25˚S)			**0**	
		20.6 (north of 23° N)				**32.1**

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

Table 2. Effort observed and reported seabird captures in 2018 - 2023 [South of 30˚S]. Entries in red do not meet WCPCF observer coverage requirements for 5% observer coverage or spatial representation. *Very high bycatch rates (>0.05) are highlighted in yellow.*

Member	*Fishing effort*					*Observed seabirds hooked*		
	Year	Number of vessels	Number of hooks ('000s)	Observed hooks ('000s)	% hooks observed	Capture number	Capture rate (birds/1000 hooks)	Raised Mortalities
Australia	2021	33	2104	190	9.0	11	0.058	122
	2022	31	2267	217	9.6	3	0.014	31
	2023	28	2357	220	9.3	7	0.032	75
	2024	30	2834	278	9.8	7	0.025	71
	2025	**34**	**3614**	**324**	**9.0**	**8**	**0.025**	**89**
China	2021	23	6511	584	9.0	0	0.000	0
	2022	52	2286	899	39.3	0	0.000	0
	2023	47	572	74	12.9	0	0.000	0
	2024	6	187	75	40.1	0	0.000	0
	2025	**7**	**1435**	**1299**	**90.5**	**3**	**0.002**	**3**
Chinese Taipei	2021	32	4852	306	6.3	0	0.000	0
	2022	21	5394	578	10.7	3	0.005	28
	2023	22	6061	442	7.3	12	0.027	165
	2024	17	3452	258	7.5	6	0.023	80
	2025	**29**	**6239**	**389**	**6.2**	**24**	**0.062**	**385**
Japan (vessels > 20 GRT)	2021	23	4036	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	22	2476	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2023	24	3675	533	14.5	46	0.086	317
	2024	20	2571	533	20.7	13	0.024	63
	2025	**21**	**3851**	**506**	**13.1**	**13**	0.026	99
New Zealand	2021	28	1535	179	11.7	53	0.296	454
	2022	22	1271	69	5.4	60	0.870	1105
	2023	20	1591	51	3.2	19	0.373	593
	2024	20	1571	1387	88.3	316*	0.228	358
	2025	**16**	**1491**	**1369**	**91.8**	**184***	**0.134**	**200**
Vanuatu	2023	37	1965	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2024	24	340	41	12.1	2	0.049	**17**
	2025	**22**	**1871**	**0**	**0.0**	**0**	Unknown	Unknown

* Fisher reported data only

Table 3. Fishing effort observed and reported seabird captures 2018- 2023 [between 25˚S - 30˚S]. Entries in red do not meet WCPCF observer coverage requirements.

Member	*Fishing effort*					*Observed seabirds hooked*		
	Year	**Number of vessels**	**Number of hooks ('000s)**	**Observed hooks ('000s)**	**% hooks observed**	**Capture number**	**Capture rate (birds/1000 hooks)**	**Raised Mortalities**
Australia	2021	22	2,658	265	10.0	1	0.004	10
	2022	22	2,594	242	9.3	6	0.025	64
	2023	21	3,407	341	10.0	2	0.006	20
	2024	22	3,623	340	9.4	8	0.024	85
	2025	**19**	**3,259**	**256**	**7.9**	**0**	**0.000**	**0**
China*	2021	308	140,511	12,911	9.2	0	0.000	0
	2022	263	122,494	7,850	6.4	0	0.000	0
	2023	335	86,500	8,893	10.3	23	0.003	224
	2024	324	146,299	9,267	6.3	2	0.000	32
	2025	**324**	**125,867**	**11,803**	**9.4**	**0**	**0.000**	**0**
Chinese Taipei	2021	38	4672	251	5.4	1	0.004	19
	2022	27	3776	185	4.9	0	0.000	0
	2023	27	3326	153	4.6	0	0.000	0
	2024	22	3808	315	8.3	0	0.000	0
	2025	**36**	**4186**	**231**	**5.5**	**0**	**0.000**	**0**
Japan (Vessels > 20GRT)	2021	12	938	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	9	702	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2023	11	944	148	15.7	1	0.007	6
	2024	10	1126	342	30.4	0	0.000	0
	2025	**13**	**1372**	**330**	**24.1**	**0**	**0.000**	**0**
Japan (Vessels < 20GRT) 23˚N – 25˚S only	2021	106	15297	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	124	13899	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2023	135	13435	544	4.0	3	0.006	74
	2024	105	13045	334	2.6	0	0.000	0
	2025	**91**	**10628**	**329**	**3.1**	**0**	**0.000**	**0**
Vanuatu	2023	37	2014	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2024	24	1697	446	26.3	15	0.034	57
	2025	**22**	**938**	**0**	**0.0**	**0**	Unknown	Unknown

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

† Preliminary data

Table 4. Fishing effort observed and reported seabird captures in 2018 – 2023 [North of 23˚N]. Entries in red do not meet WCPCF observer coverage requirements. *Very high bycatch rates (>0.05) are highlighted in yellow.* Raised mortalities for the listed fleets 2021-2025 total 37,241 birds. China has not reported fishing north of 23°N since 2022.

Member	*Fishing effort*					*Observed seabirds bycaught*		
	Year	Number of vessels	Number of hooks ('000s)	Observed hooks ('000s)	% hooks observed	Capture number	Capture rate (birds/1000 hooks)	Raised Mortalities
China	2021	17	959	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	9	183	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
Chinese Taipei	2021	109	16724	869	5.2	59	0.068	1135
	2022	122	18228	1176	6.5	89	0.076	1380
	2023	161	23305	193	0.8	6	0.031	725
	2024	169	25031	1011	4.0	58	0.057	1436
	2025	**168**	**28546**	**870**	**3.1**	**21**	**0.024**	**689**
Japan (Vessels > 20GRT)	2021	37	10139	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	33	9898	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2023	24	9694	608	6.3	150	0.247	2392
	2024	25	7650	207	2.7	17	0.082	628
	2025	**24**	**8050**	**441**	5.5	**32**	0.073	**584**
Japan (Vessels < 20GRT)	2021	176	39700	0	0.0	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2022	220	35717	0	0.00	0	Unknown	Unknown
	2023	208	37448	965	2.6	208	0.216	8072
	2024	200	37195	1097	3.0	242	0.221	8205
	2025	**195**	**32448**	**680**	2.1	**138**	0.203	**6585**
USA (Hawai'i only)	2021	143	64985	12427	19.1	184	0.015	962
	2022	131	20533	5176	25.2	201	0.039	797
	2023	139	25305	4908	19.4	77	0.016	397
	2024	144	22010	3795	17.2	99	0.026	574
	2025	**140**	**18739**	**2319**	**12.4**	**136**	**0.059**	**1099**
Vanuatu	2023	37	5486	144	2.62	23	0.160	876
	2024	24	2818	511	18.1	83	0.162	458
	2025	**22**	**1493**	**308**	**20.6**	**51**	**0.166**	**247**

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

† Preliminary data