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**BirdLife International Position Statement to WCPFC22**

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**WCPFC22-2025-OP07**  
**10 November 2025**

**Submitted by BirdLife International**

# BirdLife International Position Statement to the 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC22)

December 1-5th, 2025, Manila, Philippines

TL:DR

## The conservation status of seabirds in the WCPFC Convention Area is critical and worsening

**Bycatch is the Primary Driver:** An estimated 11,000 to 25,000 seabirds were killed annually in the WCPFC Convention Area between 2015 and 2018 → 4,000 to 4,600 were albatrosses and petrels caught south of 25°S.

**The WCPFC's scientific and technical bodies have failed their core obligations:** Despite a mandate to review mitigation measures and receiving the "best available science"—the SC and TCC have failed to provide recommendations to the Commission to address the impacts of the fishery on seabirds.

**Existing Precedent:** BLI asks opposed Members why their vessels operating in the WCPO cannot implement 2/3 seabird mitigation measures south of 25°S, given that these measures are **already required in both the IOTC and ICCAT** convention areas, where their fleets operate for the same latitudes?

**The WCPFC22 must conclude the mandated review of CMM 2018-03 (Seabirds) by adopting stronger, scientifically supported mitigation measures, thereby fulfilling its foundational obligations and arresting the critical decline of threatened seabird populations.**

BirdLife International thanks the WCPFC Secretariat for preparations of the 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and the Philippines Government for hosting us. We are grateful for the opportunity to participate in the important discussions on ecosystem-based management for this globally important fishery.

Three years ago, WCPFC19 (2022) mandated a review of CMM 2018-03 Seabirds to ensure effective mitigation methods are applied across the Convention Area where bycatch risk exists. New Zealand led this review presenting a comprehensive analysis of the best available science on the impacts of longline fishing and mitigation methods in the WCPO, involving extensive stakeholder meetings, research, analysis, presentation, reviews and responses to feedback. **The best available science dictates that WCPFC22 must adopt stronger seabird bycatch mitigation measures and effectively enforce their implementation.**

## IT IS TIME TO ACT

**The conservation status of seabirds in the WCPFC Convention Area is critical and worsening.** Many albatross and large petrel species are experiencing significant, long-term, and ongoing population declines. The Gibson's Albatross population has seen a sustained annual decline of 5.7% from 2005 to 2020. The Southern Buller's Albatross population has experienced a significant decline in recent years. ***The Antipodean Albatross, faces a risk of global extinction by 2070 if current threats are not addressed***, having declined 62% since 2004 and continuing to fall by 6% annually.

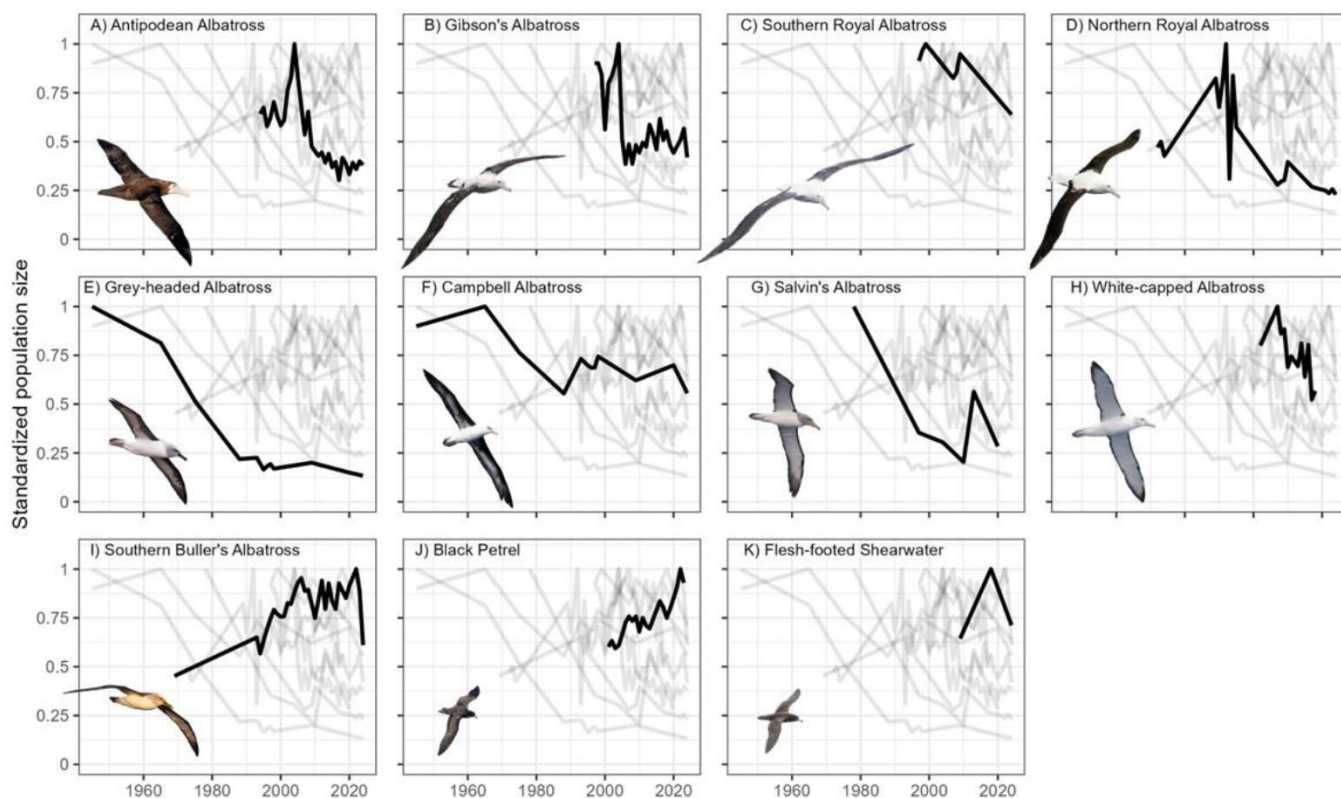


Figure from SC20-EB-WP-10: Standardized population trajectories for the entire monitoring period available for the 11 focal taxa. Black lines represent the trajectory of the focal taxon per panel, translucent lines represent other taxa in other panels.

**Bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries is a primary driver of these population declines.** An estimated 11,000 and 25,000 seabirds were killed annually in the WCPFC Convention Area during 2015-2018 -- 4,000-4,600 being albatrosses and petrels caught south of 25°S. 80% of tracked Gibson's Albatross and 75% of Southern Buller's Albatross [overlapped with pelagic longline fishing effort](#), almost exclusively within the WCPFC Convention Area.

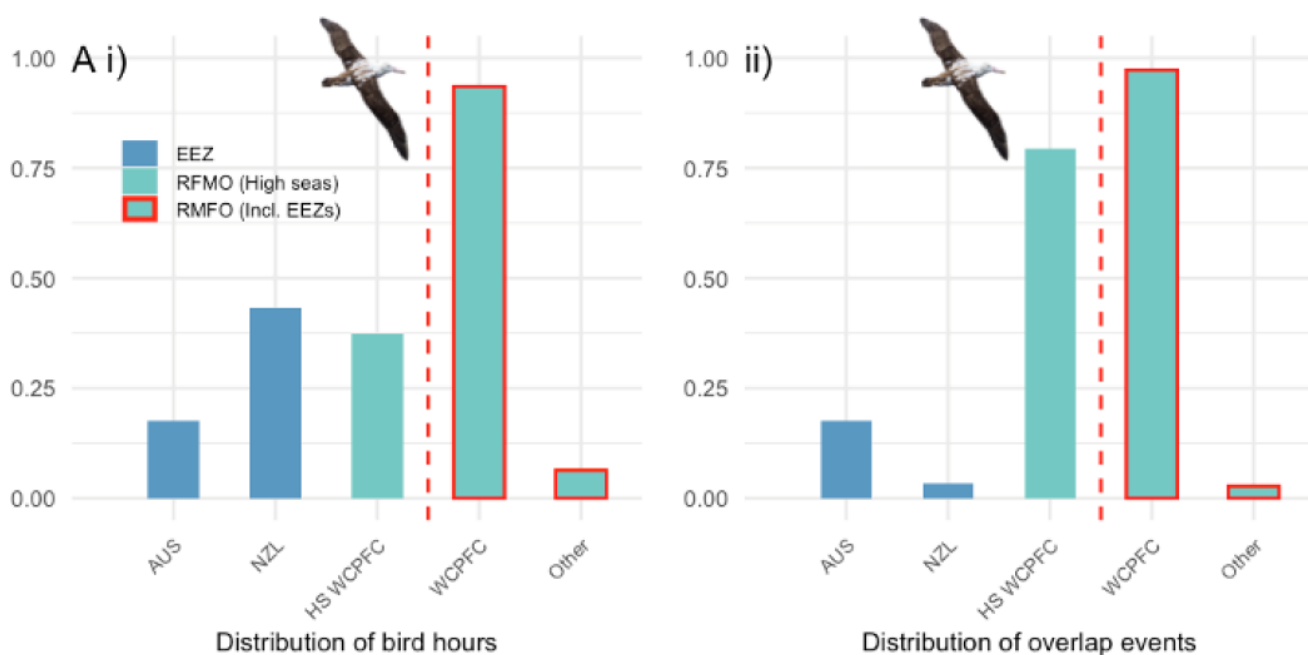


Figure from SC21-EB-IP-09: Distribution and overlap with commercial pelagic longline vessels for A) Gibson's and B) Southern Buller's Albatross.

## WCPFC IS OBLIGATED TO MANAGE IMPACTS ON NON-TARGET SPECIES

BirdLife International are disappointed that SC20, TCC20, SC21, and TCC21 have failed to make meaningful recommendations to the Commission, despite receiving advice based on the “Best Available Science” provided through New Zealand’s comprehensive review of the Seabird Bycatch CMM 2018-03. Further analysis was requested by the SC20 and New Zealand’s proposed amendments were partitioned in response to feedback from members provided in [WCPFC-SC21-2025/EB-WP-07](#), focusing on the most high risk areas of the WCPO – South of 25°S ([SC20-EB-IP30](#), [SC20-EB-WP10](#), [SC21-EB-IP09](#)), where albatross bycatch is unsustainably high. In addition, comprehensive responses to members concerns were also presented, with evidence to support those responses.

Despite this evidence, transparent processes, and collaboration of proponents, SC21 failed to provide recommendations that would meaningfully address seabird bycatch. The SC deferred to the TCC to have practical implementation discussions and despite extensive dialogue both at the meeting and intersessionally on such issues. The resulting communication from both the SC and TCC amounted to only “[Recalling](#)”, “[Noting](#)” and “[Thanks](#)” rather than **recommendations** to revise the seabird measure. This failure is in contravention to the obligations of the SC to make recommendations based on the “best available science”<sup>1,2,3</sup>.

BirdLife International reminds members that 2/3 seabird mitigation measures are already required in both the [IOTC](#) and [ICCAT](#) for areas South of 25°S. We ask members if their vessels operating in the convention areas of IOTC and ICCAT can implement 2/3 seabird bycatch mitigation measures South of 25°S, why are their vessels in the WCPO are unable to do the same?

The inability of the SC and TCC to provide timely recommendations reveals deficiencies in the Commissions processes to fulfil its obligations. Such deficiencies erode, *inter alia*, the integrity and reputation of the WCPFC as a responsible fisheries management organization. The WCPFC22 could avoid further criticism by acting on the issue of avoidable seabird bycatch and conclude the review of CMM2018-03 by adopting the proposed amendments in [WCPFC22-2025-DP04](#).

BirdLife International express our sincere gratitude to New Zealand for the significant efforts to review CMM2018-03 and provide a revised, scientifically supported proposal to address seabird bycatch. We thank Japan for their proposal to amend tori line specifications on large vessels, which will improve mitigation effectiveness and encourage WCPFC22 to adopt these changes. BLI are grateful to Members, specifically the FFA for their paper [WCPFC22-2025-DP04](#), and others who are supportive of the amendments to CMM2018-03, as many have acknowledged in plenary, seabird bycatch is an urgent conservation issue and the WCPFC must act to reduce seabird bycatch in its fisheries.

### Effective Mitigation Measures:

The **combination of three methods** is highly effective, necessary to reduce bycatch to negligible levels.

- **Tori-lines:** Highly effective with adequate aerial extent and streamers.

- **Branch Line Weighting:** Effective when adequate sink rates ( $\geq 0.5$  m/s) are achieved. It is the most observed method used in WCPFC fisheries.

- **Night Setting:** full setting between nautical dusk and nautical dawn

**Stand-alone Options:** Hook-shielding devices and underwater bait setters are highly effective as stand-alone mitigation options.

<sup>1</sup> Part II, Article 5, Paragraph (b), which states that “**Commission members ensure that measures are based on the best scientific evidence available.**”

<sup>2</sup> Part III, Section 2, Article 12, Part 1, which states that “**the Scientific Committee is established to ensure that the Commission obtains for its consideration the best scientific information available.**”

<sup>3</sup> Paragraph 2(g), the Convention, which states that, “**the SC make reports and recommendations to the Commission as directed, or on its own initiative, on matters concerning the conservation and management of and research on target stocks or non-target or associated or dependent species in the Convention Area.**”