



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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SUMMARY OF RECENT PROGRESS IN THE WORK OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS (ACAP)

(Prepared by Mr. Mark Tasker, Chair of the ACAP Advisory Committee)

Introduction

1. CMS Appendices contain a number of albatrosses and petrel species. Nearly half of the species in this group are classified under one of the IUCN's threat criteria; one the highest ratios of any bird group. There are several threats that cause the group's condition, ranging from introduced alien species on breeding islands through to bycatch in fisheries. While the former threat can be addressed primarily through national action, mitigation of bycatch, especially on high seas, requires international co-operation. These factors were the motivation for the drafting and agreeing the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP).

2. The Agreement came into force in February 2004 and within three years Argentina, Australia, Chile, Ecuador, France, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom had become Parties by ratifying the Agreement. Ratification by other States, including particularly Brazil, is expected soon. The USA and BirdLife International have both been active as observers within ACAP.

3. The First Session of the Meeting of Parties was held in Hobart in November 2004 with the Second Session in Christchurch in November 2006. An Advisory Committee has been established to provide scientific, technical and other advice to the Meeting of Parties. The first meeting of the Advisory Committee was held in July 2005, with the second in June 2006. Four Working Groups have been established under the Advisory Committee (on taxonomy; on status and trends, on breeding sites and on seabird bycatch).

Taxonomy

4. There has been some controversy over the number of albatross species, with some taxonomies describing some taxa as full species, with others systems describing these forms as sub-species (or not recognising some forms at all). The Advisory Committee has been tasked with sorting this out and providing a stable taxonomy. The Advisory Committee and

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its Taxonomy Working Group has agreed a set of guidelines for evaluating several pairs of taxa and is progressively reviewing these. Agreement has been reached that available data do not warrant the recognition of Gibson's and Antipodean albatrosses or Buller's and Pacific albatrosses at the specific level and that data suggest shy and white-capped albatrosses warrant recognition at the specific level.

5. The Taxonomy Working Group is now evaluating the following pairs of taxa:
 1. Northern royal albatross and southern royal albatross
 2. Indian yellow-nosed albatross and Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross
 3. Chatham albatross and Salvin's albatross
 4. Northern giant-petrels and southern giant-petrels
 5. Black petrels and Westland petrels
 6. White-chinned petrels and spectacled petrel
 7. Buller's and Pacific albatross (again, as the group is aware of further information that will be published shortly)

6. Once these reviews are completed, ACAP will advise CMS of its recommendations in order to enable CMS to harmonise its Appendices with ACAP should it so chose.

Status and Trends

7. This Working Group is charged primarily with assembling all available information on status and trends of species listed by ACAP. Virtually all such data known to be available has now been assembled and the Working Group has moved on to ensuring that this data is kept up-to-date and to developing ACAP Species Conservation Assessment for all ACAP-listed species. These assessments will include a basic description of each species including such information as taxonomy, breeding locations, foraging distribution and overlap with fisheries but also, importantly, would facilitate the presentation of synthesised analyses of the data collated by both the Breeding Sites Working Group (see below) and Status and Trends Working Group. These data would include summaries of known threats at each breeding site, current population sizes and population trend data. It was proposed that these Species Assessments would be web-based and housed on the ACAP web site, and also published electronically as Portable Document Format (pdf) files and in hard copy.

Breeding Sites

8. This Working Group has been building a database of the locations of all breeding sites of ACAP-listed species. This database contains information on each breeding site including any threats to the site, including the presence of any alien species (known to cause difficulties to ACAP-listed species), the conservation status of the site and any management plans. This is nearing completion and will be used to prioritise future conservation work on breeding sites. The Advisory Committee is also charged with developing advice for conservation at breeding sites and it may be that this Working Group will move on to lead on this task.

Seabird Bycatch

9. As noted above, bycatch is the greatest threat to most species listed under ACAP. Two main forms of bycatch are known, through accidental hooking on long lines and through collision with trawl warps. Fisheries are managed both by national authorities and by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations. ACAP (and its Committees and Working Groups) recognise that it must work with and through fisheries managers if it is to be successful in reaching its objectives of improving the conservation status of the albatrosses and petrels. The Seabird Bycatch working Group has been charged with drawing up a strategy for ACAP Parties and range states to engage with RFMOs. As a first step, various Parties to ACAP have agreed to take a lead in considering appropriate interactions with each RFMO.

10. An indicative work plan for the Seabird Bycatch Working Group has been agreed, that will be discussed and refined within the bycatch strategy:

1. Collate available information on the foraging distribution of ACAP species and the degree of spatial and temporal overlap with fisheries;
2. Review and utilise available information on foraging distribution and seabird bycatch to assess the risk of fishing operations on ACAP species in fishing regions (e.g. RFMO areas of competence, national EEZs);
3. Review information on mitigation measures for fishing methods known to impact albatrosses and petrels. Initial work shall focus on pelagic longline methods;
4. Develop products to assist RFMOs and other relevant international and national bodies in reducing seabird bycatch. These could include:
 - observer programme designs including protocols for the collection of seabird bycatch data;
 - analytical methods for assessing seabird bycatch; and
 - best-practice mitigation measures;
5. Assist in the preparation, adoption and implementation of FAO NPOA-Seabirds, including the development of best-practice guidelines; and
6. Develop materials and guidelines to assist ACAP representatives attending RFMO and other relevant meetings to maximise effective participation and consideration of issues relevant to ACAP.

11. Ultimately, it is hoped that the Agreement's engagements with RFMOs (and by Parties acting on behalf of and with the interests of ACAP) will encourage them to take the necessary actions to reduce at-sea mortality of ACAP species. These actions are likely to include the adopting of mitigation measures similar to those pioneered by CCAMLR in the Southern Ocean, but also be fully consistent with FAO's International Plan of Action for Seabirds. The Convenor of the Seabird Bycatch Working Group is Barry Baker, who as CMS's Councillor for Bycatch should be able to ensure full co-operation and coherence with CMS centrally on this issue.

Other issues

12. The Second Session of the Meeting of Parties agreed further actions for the Advisory Committee. These include:

- Development of a framework to guide the listing of further species in Annex 1:
The issue of adding further species to ACAP's lists was considered but decisions were postponed until a suitable framework was agreed.
- Development of a strategy for capacity building:
Several Parties to ACAP have economies in transition and are not at present able to take as much conservation action for ACAP as they might wish or is needed by albatrosses and petrels. This strategy will aim to address this problem.
- Develop a system of indicators for the success of the ACAP Agreement.
- Develop a database of relevant scientific literature.
- Develop a directory of relevant legislation.

13. In addition, the apparently rapidly worsening status of waved albatross *Phoebastria irrorata* will be the subject of special action, particularly as the two range states (Peru and Ecuador) of the species both have economies in transition.

14. The best source of further information on ACAP is its website: www.acap.aq.