

**PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE CONVENTION
ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS**

A. PROPOSAL: Inclusion of *Phoebetria palpebrata* in Appendix II.

B. PROPONENT: Government of Australia

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxonomy

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|--------------------|---|
| 1.1 Class | Aves |
| 1.2 Order | Procellariiformes |
| 1.3 Family | Diomedelidae |
| 1.4 Genus/Species | <i>Phoebetria palpebrata</i> |
| 1.5 Common Name(s) | Light-mantled Sooty Albatross (English)
Albatros fuligineux (French)
Albatros Tiznado (Spanish) |

2. Biological Data

2.1. Distribution (current and historical)

Breeding known at ten sites: South Georgia, Marion and Prince Edward Is., Crozet Is., Kerguelen Is., Heard I., Macquarie I., Auckland Is., Campbell and Antipodes Is..

The pelagic range of *P. palpebrata* generally encompasses the circumpolar region from the pack ice to 35°S but little is known about movements at sea (Marchant and Higgins 1990). The presence of Antarctic krill, which only occurs south of the Antarctic Polar Front, in the diet of *P. palpebrata* indicates that these birds commute long distances to southern foraging areas during the breeding season (Berruti 1979, Thomas 1992, Weimerskirch *et al.* 1986, Cooper and Klages 1995). From the Crozet Is. this would necessitate journeys of at least 1 000km (Weimerskirch *et al.* 1986). A satellite tracking study of *P. palpebrata* at Macquarie I. during the incubation phase showed that these birds travel at least 1500km to their foraging grounds, south of the Antarctic Polar Front (Weimerskirch and Robertson 1994). In this study five birds were tracked and they moved rapidly to specific sectors of the Southern Ocean, where they spent several days foraging before returning to their nests (Weimerskirch and Robertson 1994). These data support the observations of the southern pelagic distribution of *P. palpebrata* during summer (Thomas 1982, Weimerskirch *et al.* 1986).

During non-breeding periods (austral winter and years between breeding attempts) the movements of *P. palpebrata* are poorly understood. During late autumn and winter the range appears to extend northwards, extending into subtropical waters, particularly in the Australian, New Zealand and South Pacific region (Marchant and Higgins 1990). In the Australian region *P. palpebrata* occur regularly in the pelagic areas south and south-east of Australia. In New Zealand waters they are most common around the Auckland Is., although in winter and spring they are moderately frequent in offshore waters as far north as 30°S, particularly in the Tasman Sea (J. A. Bartle pers. comm. in Gales 1993). Most records in the Australian, New Zealand and southern African regions occur in winter (Marchant and Higgins 1990). In South America *P. palpebrata* are regular visitors to the Magellanic region and the Humboldt Current, usually to about 40°S (Marchant and Higgins 1990).

2.2 Population

Breeding population is estimated at about 21 500 pairs, which equates to approximately 140 000 individuals (Gales, in press). This species breeds biennially.

The status of populations has not been established for any of the locations except for the Possession I. population which is decreasing. At other sites there has not been comprehensive monitoring of populations. At South Georgia *P. palpebrata* is dispersed around 800km of coastline and has not been monitored (P. A. Prince pers. comm. in Gales 1993). Downes *et al.* (1959) estimated that there were about 500 - 700 pairs breeding on Heard I in 1954 and more recent expeditions (late 1980s) have reported 100 - 300 pairs (R. Kirkwood pers. comm. in Gales 1993). Neither survey was comprehensive. Similarly, the populations on Antipodes, Campbell and Auckland Is. have not been systematically counted and estimates for these locations are also crude (C.J.R. Robertson pers. comm. in Gales 1993).

The population on Macquarie I. was estimated at 700 pairs in 1975 (K. Kerry pers. comm. in Gales 1993). In the 1992 - 93 breeding season the breeding population was estimated at 1000 - 1150 pairs. As *P. palpebrata* are generally biennial breeders, the population is estimated at about 2000 pairs. Census techniques during the two studies were not standardised and therefore the difference should not be interpreted as a population increase.

2.3. Habitat

Detailed studies of the breeding biology of *P. palpebrata* have been carried out at South Georgia (Thomas *et al.* 1983), Marion I. (Berruti 1979) and Crozet Is. (Mougin 1970, Weimerskirch *et al.* 1986).

Nests are usually situated on vegetated ledges of cliffs, or on steep slopes or high peaks, which may be coastal or inland. The nest is usually a low cone, constructed of mud and vegetation and nests are either solitary or in small groups (generally <10).

2.4. Migratory patterns

See Distribution

3. **Threat data**

3.1. Direct threats to the population

P. palpebrata are known to scavenge refuse from ships, although Weimerskirch and Jouventin (1986) comment that the *Phoebastria* species engage in this less frequently than *Diomedea* species. From extensive observations in the Indian Ocean, N. P. Brothers (pers. comm. in Gales 1993) observed that interactions with fishing boats are minimal in areas of low *P. palpebrata* abundance, but in areas and times when birds are more abundant they are highly active and efficient at scavenging baits and discards.

In May - June 1988, of 32 identified albatross killed on Japanese tuna longlines off the coast of Australia (Australia), 9% were *P. palpebrata* (Brothers 1991). When these catch rate data were extrapolated in relation to the fishing effort, Brothers (1991) estimated that at least 4125 *P.*

palpebrata are killed each year by Japanese longlines targeting southern bluefin tuna (*Thunnus maccoyii*) in the Southern Oceans. The provenance of these birds is not known, but this annual bycatch estimate is equivalent to about 4 times the annual breeding population in Australia, or more than half of the world's largest breeding population (no. pairs per year).

Weimerskirch and Robertson (1994) showed that *P. palpebrata* from Macquarie I. feed south of 50°S during the incubation phase of the breeding cycle, and so breeding adults are not likely to coincide with Japanese longlining efforts. However, during the apparent extension into more northern, subtropical waters during non-breeding periods these birds coincide and interact with this fishery.

Observations of trawling and longline operations in the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone of New Zealand in 1989 - 90 recorded no *P. palpebrata* bycatch (Bartle 1991a, Murray *et al.* 1993). The knowledge of albatross species affected by these fisheries may be incomplete as, at least in the trawl fishery observations, only 31% of the seabirds caught were returned for identification. Predation by feral cats has been proposed as a factor contributing to nestling mortality on Marion I. and Macquarie I., although eradication programs at Marion I. should now have eliminated this factor.

3.2. Habitat destruction

None known.

3.3. Indirect threat

No indirect threats to *P. palpebrata* have been identified (pers. comm. J. A. Bartle, P. Jouventin, K. Kerry, N.T.W. Klages, P.A. Prince, C.J.R. Robertson, H. Weimerskirch). At Macquarie I., the reason for the declining breeding success during the course of the 1970s study by Kerry and Garland (1984) has not been identified. At Campbell I. the steep nesting habitat isolates *P. palpebrata* from the disturbance caused by sheep and, similarly, on Auckland Is. they are isolated from the effects of pigs (Robertson 1985). No plastic particles were found in the stomach contents of *P. palpebrata* examined by Cooper and Klages (1995).

From the dietary data available, it appears that competition for food resources between *P. palpebrata* and commercial fisheries is limited.

3.4. Threat connected especially with migrations

Pelagic threats include fisheries bycatch discussed above.

3.5. National and International Utilisation

None known.

4. **Protection status and needs**

4.1. National protection status

Completely protected in Australia, including its Exclusive Economic Zone (to 200nm) and all

external territories.

4.2. International protection status

None known.

4.3. Additional protection needs

Research is required into the nature and extent of fisheries mortality in longline and other fisheries. Methods of mitigating this threat (e.g. tori (bird) poles, night setting, weighted branch lines, bait throwing devices) have been developed and should be appropriately assessed and implemented in each type of fishery operation. Assessment of mitigating methods should consider the effect on the catch of target species as measures will only be used on the high seas if they do not impact on the efficiency and economics of the fishery. The mitigating measures should not increase bycatch of other species. National and International cooperation and collaboration between fisheries managers, fishers, ornithologists and regulators should encouraged.

A greater coverage of specialist seabird scientific observers on boats fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zones of range states and on the high seas is needed to improve the quality and quantity of bycatch data. Currently, most observers are present on boats to mainly record target species catch data.

Where possible carcasses of birds killed should be retained for analysis of species, provenance, age and sex. Banded birds should be reported.

5. Known Range States

Argentina, Australia, Brazil, France, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom, International Waters (Indian, Pacific, Atlantic, Southern Oceans)

6. Comments from Range States

7. Additional remarks

8. References

See Reference at the very end of this document (pp. 182-187).