

Regional Report to the 44th Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee – Oceania

Regional activities for the implementation of the Convention on Migratory Species and its related instruments

1. CMS and its relevant instruments

CMS

Australia provided a voluntary contribution of \$100,000 in June 2014 to the CMS Secretariat for key migratory species initiatives, including implementation of the Single Species Action Plan for Loggerhead Turtles in the South Pacific Ocean.

Agreements for conservation of specific species

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)

Australia and New Zealand are the only Oceania Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP).

Australia hosts the ACAP Secretariat in Hobart, Tasmania. ACAP aims to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels by encouraging and coordinating conservation action at national, regional and global levels.

In ACAP's current triennial work program particular emphasis is placed on actions to monitor levels and trends of breeding populations, and reduce threats on land (e.g. damage to and disturbance at breeding habitats) and at sea (e.g. mortality arising from marine pollution and interactions with fisheries). In line with these priorities, major Australian conservation actions presently include:

- undertaking population monitoring of Australia's main breeding sites for albatrosses and petrels (Tasmania and Macquarie Island)
- implementing an updated Threat Abatement Plan for the incidental catch (or bycatch) of seabirds during oceanic longline fishing operations
- reviewing National Recovery Plan for threatened albatrosses and giant petrels breeding and/or foraging in Australian jurisdiction
- completing a successful five year alien invasive pest eradication project at Macquarie Island that eliminated rabbits, rats and mice, which had extensively degraded the breeding habitat of seabirds and other animals
- undertaking research projects on improving measures to avoid or reduce seabird bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries (e.g. line weighting regimes, and underwater setting devices), and trawl fisheries (e.g. devices to mitigate risk of warp strikes).

The results of these conservation actions are shared internationally with other ACAP Parties, as well as various regional and other forums.

Australia and New Zealand attended the Fifth Meeting of the Parties: Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain, 4-8 May 2015. **MoP5 Doc 11** 'Progress with the Implementation of the Agreement 2013-2015' (available at <http://www.acap.aq/en/meeting-of-the-parties/mop5/mop5-meeting-documents>). This document includes summary information from Australia (and other ACAP Parties) about implementation of the Agreement during 2013-2015.

Australia and New Zealand also attended the Eighth Meeting of the Advisory Committee: Punta del Este, Uruguay, 15-19 September 2014.

AC8 Inf 04 '2014 Implementation Report – Australia' (available at <http://www.acap.aq/en/advisory-committee/ac8/ac8-information-papers>) includes information from Australia about implementation of the Agreement in 2014, and provides greater detail than the summary report concerning all Parties to Fifth Meeting of the Parties in 2015.

AC8 Inf 09 '2014 Implementation Report – New Zealand' (available at <http://www.acap.aq/en/advisory-committee/ac8/ac8-information-papers>) includes information from New Zealand about implementation of the Agreement in 2014, and provides greater detail than the summary report concerning all Parties to Fifth Meeting of the Parties in 2015.

New Zealand has an ongoing conservation and research programme involving ACAP-listed albatrosses and petrels. New Zealand produced a new National Plan of Action – Seabirds in 2013 (<http://www.mpi.govt.nz/Default.aspx?TabId=126&id=1760>). This applies to all ACAP-listed species occurring in New Zealand, and includes a series of objectives relating to seabird conservation and management. There is a five-year timeframe for the implementation of this Plan.

The prioritisation of activities in this Plan is supported by an assessment of the risk New Zealand commercial fisheries represent to seabird populations (https://fs.fish.govt.nz/Doc/23121/AEBR_109_2596_PRO2010-02,%20Obj.%201,%20MS4,%20RR2,1.pdf.ashx).

Memoranda of Understanding for the conservation of specific species

Marine Turtles IOSEA

Australia is one of 35 signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA turtle MoU). The IOSEA turtle MoU sets out a framework through which states can work together to conserve and replenish depleted marine turtle populations for which they share responsibility. This objective is achieved through the collective implementation of an associated Conservation and Management Plan.

The Australian Government undertakes a range of policy and on-the-ground activities that contribute to the implementation of actions under the six objectives of the Conservation and Management Plan (CMP):

- 1. Reduce direct and indirect causes of marine turtle mortality;*
- 2. Protect, conserve and rehabilitate marine turtle habitats;*
- 3. Improve understanding of marine turtle ecology and populations through research, monitoring and information exchange;*
- 4. Increase public awareness of the threats to marine turtles and their habitats, and enhance public participation in conservation activities;*
- 5. Enhance national, regional and international cooperation;*
- 6. Promote implementation of the MoU including the Conservation and Management Plan*

Major Australian conservation and management initiatives include:

- The 2003 'Recovery Plan for Marine Turtles in Australia' provides overarching guidance on a range of research, conservation and management activities that are currently being implemented. The plan facilitates national coordination of activities. The Plan is currently being reviewed and updated.
- To ensure sustainable, legal hunting of marine turtles, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is working with Traditional Owners and supporting them to develop and implement Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements (TUMRAs).
- TUMRAs are a type of sea country plan that are developed by Traditional Owners and are accredited by the Australian and Queensland Governments. A TUMRA may, for example, put in place management arrangements to ensure any traditional take of dugong or turtle does not exceed sustainable limits. It also establishes a partnership between the Traditional Owners and the GBRMPA to collaborate on compliance activities and monitoring of the condition of plants and animals, and human activities in their sea country.
- The Australian Government has committed \$5.3M towards the Dugong and Turtle Protection Plan which seeks to address threats to these species in Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait. The Plan includes funding for a Specialised Indigenous Ranger Programme, management of marine debris, rehabilitation centres and the investigation into the illegal poaching and trading of dugong over the period from 2014 – 2017.
- The Australian Government is also supporting a range of research and management actions aimed at the conservation and management of turtles including surveys to determine their distribution and relative abundance, genetic studies, seagrass surveys and building the capacity of Indigenous people to undertake turtle monitoring and management
- The Australian Government promotes the IOSEA MoU by encouraging other range states to sign the MoU and in 2013/2014 the Australian Government provided a \$20,000 voluntary contribution to assist the Secretariat progress the IOSEA MoU.

With the support of the New Zealand Government, SPREP is implementing a programme in Fiji (CMS Party) Kiribati, and the Solomon Islands (Signatory to IOSEA) to promote community-based monitoring of turtle nesting beaches, with a view to developing ecotourism ventures. Technical training has been provided, and a presentation was made at the Blue Days conference on ecotourism and iconic marine species, held in French Polynesia in May 2015.

By-catch in fishing operations is an unknown, but likely significant, threat to turtles and other non-target threatened and migratory species in the Pacific Islands. Although turtles face additional threats from marine debris and climate change, directed take remains a major threat to turtle populations in Oceania, SPREP's Marine Species Action Plan for Turtles (2013-2017) includes actions to quantify the level of take.

At the last SPREP meeting, Members agreed that where the take of turtles is still permitted, Members should:

- provide to SPREP any reliable estimates that may be available on the level of permitted take;
- consider prohibiting or more strictly regulating the take of turtles, particularly for major gatherings that involve the harvesting of large numbers of individual turtles; and
- prohibit the take of turtle eggs and nesters.

Dugong

The Australian Government is implementing conservation and management actions to address our national and regional priorities identified under the CMS Dugong MoU and Conservation and Management Plan (CMP).

Key initiatives towards dugong conservation and management include:

- The Australian Government provided a voluntary contribution of \$5,000 in 2013/14 to the Dugong MoU.
- The Australian Government provides in-kind support to the value of approximately US\$85 million, to implement global initiatives under the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project (2015 – 2018). This goal of this project is to improve the conservation effectiveness of seagrass ecosystems that support globally significant populations of dugong across the Indian and Pacific Ocean Basins.
- To ensure sustainable, legal hunting the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is working with Traditional Owners and supporting them to develop and implement Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements (TUMRAs).
- TUMRAs are a type of sea country plan that are developed by Traditional Owners and are accredited by the Australian and Queensland Governments. A TUMRA may, for example, put in place management arrangements to ensure any traditional take of dugong or turtle is sustainable, or establish agreed 'no take' zones within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. It also establishes a partnership between the Traditional Owners and the GBRMPA to collaborate on compliance activities and monitoring of the condition of plants and animals, and human activities in their sea country.
- The Australian Government is supporting a range of research and management actions aimed at the conservation and management of dugongs including, large-scale aerial surveys to determine their distribution and relative abundance, genetic studies, seagrass surveys, dugong protection areas to minimise impacts of gill netting, go slow areas to minimise impacts of boat strike, and building the capacity of Indigenous people to undertake dugong monitoring and management.

The GEF funded Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project will also directly benefit the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. SPREP attended the inception workshop in Honiara in April, and has been working with the CMS Dugong MoU Secretariat in Abu Dhabi to scope the possible extent of a collaboration that will facilitate the delivery of conservation management for both dugong and seagrass, not only to the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, but also to other SPREP range states.

SPREP's proposed collaboration with the CMS Dugong MoU Secretariat and the Governments of the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and other dugong range states will be dependent on community-based management of this endangered species and critical habitat, in which it is anticipated that ecotourism will provide an important economic benefit. This initiative provides a unique opportunity to secure the survival of dugong for future generations of Pacific Islanders.

Pacific Islands Cetaceans

Oceania Parties represent 12 of the 15 signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region. The United States became the most recent signatory in 2012. This MoU was developed in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

The MoU provides an intergovernmental framework for all participating governments, scientists and other groups to monitor and coordinate conservation efforts for

cetaceans that inhabit and migrate through the coastal waters of various Pacific countries and territories and the high seas of the Pacific.

In consultation with member states, SPREP developed a Whale and Dolphin Action Plan, which was adopted in 2003 as the first plan for the Pacific Cetaceans MoU. This was reviewed in 2012 and adopted at the Third Meeting of the Signatories (September, New Caledonia) and now stands as the 2013 – 2017 MoU Action Plan. The plan is appended to the MoU and forms the basis for on-the-water cetacean conservation efforts throughout the region.

In September 2014, at the 25th SPREP meeting, it was agreed that 2016/17 would be designated the Pacific Year of the Whale. Australia is a member of the working group established to develop a workplan, which will be focussed on building, sharing and supporting cetacean conservation initiatives in the Pacific.

In December 2008, the Australian Government announced the International Whale and Marine Mammal Conservation Initiative (IWMMCI). The objective of the programme was to enable the Australian Government to develop a proposal for improving and modernising the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The programme established Australia as a leading nation in marine mammal science and conservation in the Southern Hemisphere and has to date supported the scientific argument against whaling, demonstrating that we can learn all we need to know about cetacean biology using non-lethal techniques.

Activities towards achieving this objective are continuing to be pursued through the Australian-led international whale research initiative, the International Whaling Commission's Southern Ocean Research Partnership, and both domestically and regionally through the Australian Marine Mammal Centre.

These activities also guide Australian policy makers in cetacean conservation and management and other international engagement on related issues.

New Zealand has an ongoing research and conservation programme for marine cetaceans <http://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/marine-mammals/>.

SMART (Sustainable Marine Mammal Actions in Recreation and Tourism) is a voluntary collaboration between commercial boat operators and the Department of Conservation launched in October 2014 for the protection of marine mammals in New Zealand. It raises awareness of the rules for vessels around marine mammals and helps skippers assess the behaviour of seals, dolphins and whales they encounter so they can make appropriate decisions when interacting with them. Operators commit to activities that have minimal disturbance on whales, dolphins and seals.

The Cook Strait Whale Survey, a Department of Conservation partnership with OMV New Zealand, has taken place each winter from 2004. It is assessing humpback whale recovery since commercial whaling ended in New Zealand in 1964 and aims to estimate the size of our humpback population. The 2015 four-week survey spotted a record 137 humpback whales indicating the population is continuing to recover.

At the 2014 meeting of the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission, it was agreed that the most recent estimate produced of approximately 5,000 humpback whales overwintering in the Oceania region was the best available estimate, and that the population had been reduced to approximately 1-2% of this number by the late 1960s,

Sharks MoU

The Sharks MoU aims to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for the shark species listed. Promoting cooperation and information-sharing between countries that have signed the MoU is a major focus of the instrument.

Action under the Sharks MoU aims to improve understanding of migratory shark populations, key pressures and key habitats, and current and future actions to conserve these species.

Australia signed the Sharks MOU in 2011. Activities being undertaken by the Australian Government in relation to the Sharks MoU include:

- A voluntary contribution approximately \$80,000 to the Sharks MoU over the last four years (approximately \$20,000 per year from 2012 -2015) to support research, conservation projects and the CMS sharks secretariat.
- Supporting a range of projects to better understand white sharks. Projects include:
 - A white shark project to better understand abundance and population trends on the east coast of Australia. This project makes use of novel genetic and electronic tagging techniques.
 - A project to identify aggregation sites of white sharks on the south and west coasts of Australian. This project will help understand the population size and dynamics of the western Australian white shark population.

Vanuatu and Samoa are the most recent Pacific island signatories to the Sharks MOU, signing in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Other Oceania signatories to the MoU include Nauru, Palau and Tuvalu.

New Zealand also became a signatory to the MOU on 6 July 2015.

<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-zealand-steps-support-international-shark-conservation>

The New Zealand National Plan of Action-Sharks 2013 was adopted in January 2014 (<http://www.mpi.govt.nz/document-vault/1138>). The purpose of the NPOA-Sharks 2013 is to maintain the biodiversity and the long-term viability of all New Zealand shark populations by recognising their role in marine ecosystems, ensuring that any utilisation of sharks is sustainable, and that New Zealand receives positive recognition internationally for its efforts in shark conservation and management. The overall approach is to use a science-based risk assessment framework to identify and appropriately manage risks to shark populations.

Since 1 October 2014 it has been illegal for a commercial fisher to remove the fins from any shark and discard the body of the shark at sea in New Zealand. The NPOA-Sharks 2013 aims to improve the use and minimise waste in New Zealand shark fisheries by developing and implementing best practice guidelines for the avoidance of bycatch, promoting the live release of bycaught shark species, developing and implementing best practice guidelines for the handling and release of live sharks, and by eliminating shark finning.

2. Activities related to:

Scientific Research and Monitoring

Australia is undertaking a range of projects on CMS-listed shark species, including:

- A project looking at the genetics and population dynamics of river sharks and sawfish in northern Australia.
- A project to identify Northern Australian hotspots for the recovery threatened euryhaline species (sawfish and riversharks).
- A project to establish the status of Australia's hammerhead sharks.

New Zealand is undertaking a range of projects on CMS-listed species, including:

- Assessing the population size and key population parameters of ACAP species including the black petrel, Salvin's albatross, white-capped albatross, southern Buller's albatross, Gibson's albatross, and white-chinned petrels. (<http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservation/marine-and-coastal/marine-conservation-services/plans/draft-csp-annual-plan-2014-15.pdf>).
- Updating the assessment of the risk that commercial fisheries represent for New Zealand seabird populations.
- Continuing observer coverage (<http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservation/marine-and-coastal/marine-conservation-services/approved-csp-annual-plan-2013-14.pdf>) at sea to improve understanding of the nature and extent of bycatch of ACAP-listed species in commercial fisheries.
- Continuing research (<http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservation/marine-and-coastal/marine-conservation-services/approved-csp-annual-plan-2013-14.pdf>) into at-sea distributions of several ACAP-listed species.
- Continuing research (<http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservation/marine-and-coastal/marine-conservation-services/approved-csp-annual-plan-2013-14.pdf>) on mitigation approaches for reducing bycatch of ACAP-listed species, e.g., in trawl and longline fisheries.
- Continuing population monitoring programmes (<http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservation/marine-and-coastal/marine-conservation-services/approved-csp-annual-plan-2013-14.pdf>), focusing on species likely to be at higher risk due to fisheries impacts.

Education and Public Awareness

New Zealand is undertaking a number of education and awareness raising activities, including:

- A bi-monthly newsletter (<http://www.doc.govt.nz/conservation/marine-and-coastal/conservation-services-programme/bycatch-bylines-newsletter/>) that focuses on protected species interactions with commercial fisheries. The priority audience for this publication is commercial fishers. However, copies are distributed widely, including amongst scientists, government, NGOs, and international stakeholders.

- Videos profiling industry representatives and their work on seabird bycatch issues have been promulgated by Southern Seabird Solutions (<http://southernseabirds.org/>) (SSS). Other resources available through SSS include posters and brochures describing more seabird-friendly fishing practices.

Capacity Building

New Zealand is undertaking the following capacity building activities:

- Port-based workshops (<http://southernseabirds.org/projects/seabird-smart-training-for-skippers-crew/>) have been held engaging fishermen on seabird issues, including bycatch reduction measures, the importance of observer coverage, and seabird conservation status.

International Cooperation

SPREP advertised in July for a Shark and Ray Conservation Officer on a short-term contract to December 2016. A priority for the appointee will be to work with Members who wish to develop domestic legislation to improve the protection for sharks and rays, and to draft a Shark Action Plan to be incorporated into the next round of Marine Species Action Plans (2018-2023).

Budget decisions arising from CoP11 meant that funding from CMS to support the CMS Pacific Officer, based at SPREP, was not renewed. As such, the position has been discontinued at this stage.

Protection of migratory species, conservation measures

Fiji successfully promoted the adoption of its listing proposal covering nine species of mobulid rays at CMS CoP 11.

Australia has developed a Whale and Dolphin Protection Plan (2014-2017) whose objectives are to:

- enhance the Australian public's understanding of whales through supporting whale watching tourism;
- improve knowledge of the threats facing dolphins in Australian waters by funding research;
- facilitate the management of dolphins in Australian coastal waters through the provision of targeted grants;
- improve animal welfare outcomes and survival of stranded and entangled animals by supporting the states and the Northern Territory to purchase equipment and train staff that respond to cetacean strandings and entanglements; and
- increase understanding of the causes and management of cetacean strandings and entanglement by funding research.

Australia is currently reviewing the *Australian National Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching 2005* to ensure we continue to implement *best practice* management in this area. The review has included a comprehensive literature review and workshop in May 2015 with relevant stakeholders. This included representatives from; state government, scientific experts, industry, and non-government organisations. A report from this meeting is currently being considered by attendees.

There are five cetacean species listed as threatened under Australia's national environmental legislation – the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Recovery plans were developed for Australia's threatened blue, fin, sei, humpback, and Southern right whales (2005 – 2010). The Southern right whale plan was revised in 2011, and this new plan conforms to the International Whaling Commission's 'Conservation Management Plan' format, while meeting the requirements of a recovery plan under the EPBC Act. The revised Blue Whale Conservation Management Plan is in the final stages of development and is expected to be finalised shortly.

Australia is developing a National Vessel Strike Strategy to reduce and minimise the risk of vessel strike on cetaceans. The Strategy includes data collection through an IWC-style database, undertaking a risk assessment, and developing adaptive mitigation measures.

In New Zealand, a number of new marine reserves were created around the Subantarctic Islands in 2014. The 452,691 hectares reserve around the Antipodes, Bounty and Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku are all important breeding areas for migratory marine mammals and ACAP-listed species.

Administrative, Institutional and Legislative/Policy measures

In New Zealand, the Kaikōura (Te Tai ō Marokura) Marine Management Act 2014 established a number of marine protection and sustainable fisheries measures in the Kaikōura marine environment with implications for some migratory species.

To support the NPOA-Sharks 2013, and especially the elimination of shark finning, the New Zealand Government made amendments to the Fisheries (Commercial Fishing) Regulations 2001, the Fisheries (Reporting) Regulations 2001 and Schedule 6 of the Fisheries Act 1996, and issued the Fisheries (Shark fin to greenweight ratio) Circular 2014 (Notice No. MPI 391) to provide allowable ratios between landed fin weight to landed greenweight for seven shark species (including porbeagle shark) with definition of which fins are to be included in the calculation, and the Fisheries (Conversion Factors) Notice 2014 (Notice No. MPI 392) which gives definitions and greenweight conversions for different levels of dressing of fish, including sharks.

3. Activities planned for next year

In New Zealand, the draft Conservation Services Programme Annual Plan 2015/16 describes those services proposed to be delivered as conservation services during the 2015/16 financial year <http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservation/marine-and-coastal/marine-conservation-services/plans/draft-csp-annual-plan-2015-16.pdf>.