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

A. PROPOSAL: Inclusion of *Phoebetriafusca* in Appendix II.

B. PROPONENT: **Government of Australia**

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxonomy

1.1 Class	Aves
1.2 Order	Procellariiformes
1.3 Family	Diomedeidae
1.4 Genus/Species	*Phoebetriafusca* Hilsenberg, 1822
1.5 Common Name(s)	Sooty Albatross (English)
	Albatros brun (French)
	Albatros Ahumado (Spanish)

2. Biological Data

2.1. Distribution (current and historical)

Breeding recorded at Tristan da Cunha Is., Gough I., Marion and Prince Edward Is., Crozet Is., Kerguelen Is., Amsterdam I., St. Paul I.

Little is known about the marine distribution of *P. fusca* except that it is dispersive and pelagic. There are few band recoveries away ftom breeding locations (Weimerskirch *et al.* 1985). *P. fusca* and *P. palpebrata* are often confused at-sea, making distribution data difficult to interpret.

During the summer breeding season the pelagic range includes the South Atlantic and southern Indian Ocean, between 35° and 50°S in subtropical and subantarctic waters (down to 64°S in southwest Indian Ocean), the greatest abundance being near the subtropical convergence (Weimerskirch *et al.* 1986, Marchant and Higgins 1990). At Marion I. some birds probably travel over 350km to forage south of the Antarctic Polar Front, although they do this less frequently than the sympatric *P. palpebrata* (Cooper and Klages 1995). In winter, most are observed between 30° - 40°S in the subtropical zone, where immature birds remain throughout the year (Stahl 1987 in Marchant and Higgins 1990). *P. fusca* are seen in small numbers off the southern coast of Australia, particularly beyond the continental shelf, between March and November (Marchant and Higgins 1990). They are rare visitors to southern African waters and have not been observed in the New Zealand region.

2.2. Population

Breeding population is estimated at about 15 500, which equates to approximately 100 000 individuals (Gales in press).

It is difficult to assess the status of *P. fusca* as there are few historical data to compare with recent population estimates. On Tristan da Cunha, the population was utilised by islanders harvesting

eggs, chicks and adults, and Richardson (1984) reports take of 210 chicks and 5 - 10 adults in 1974. The population on Ile de la Possession, Crozet Is. has declined 58% since 1980 (Weimerskirch and Jouventin, in press). Breeding of *P. fusca* at the Kerguelen Is. was confirmed in 1984, when 9 nests were seen (Roux 1987). In 1986-87 only 3 - 5 pairs were observed breeding (Weimerskirch *et al.* 1989). The status of the populations in the Prince Edward Island group and the Tristan and Gough Islands is unknown (J. Cooper pers. comm. in Gales 1993).

2.3. Habitat

Typically, *P. fusca* breeds on cliff ledges or steep slopes. Given their preference for steep habitat, nest density varies with terrain and on Crozet Is. they are the least colonial of the 6 resident albatross species. The nest structure varies from a shallow scrape to a well formed truncated cone of vegetation and mud.

2.4. Migratory patterns

See Distribution

3. Threat data

The major factors influencing the current population status of *P. fusca* have not been identified but it is likely that fisheries interactions are having an impact on at least some populations.

3.1. Direct threats to the population

P. fusca is known to follow and scavenge from fishing vessels (Lindsey 1986, Cooper and Klages 1995). A low incidence of interactions has been reported which is probably a reflection of the distribution of observer coverage rather than bycatch. Bycatch of immature and adult birds has been reported from Exculsive Economic Zone fisheries, but is reported to be considerably more frequent on the High Seas. Observer coverage in these areas is limited and access to data is restricted. In July 1993 *P. fusca* were killed on a Japanese longline operating in the Cape Town southern bluefin tuna grounds (N. Brothers pers. comm. in Gales 1991). Around the Crozet Is., *P. fusca* shows a preference for the area within the latitudes of 40° - 50° S (Weimerskirch *et al.* 1986). This area has been intensively fished by the Japanese and this fishing effort correlates significantly with the decline in the Crozet Is. population (Weimerskirch and Jouventin, in press). Sporadic human predation of eggs, chicks and adults by Tristan da Cunha islanders may also constitute a threat to the *P. fusca* population (Richardson 1984).

3.2. Habitat destruction

Fire and introduced rats *(Rattus norvegicus)* threaten the small populations breeding on St. Paul and Amsterdam Is. Apart ftom the direct threat, repeated fires are thought to have reduced vegetation cover in the breeding areas to the extent that nest building material is now scarce (Jouventin *et al.* 1984).

3.3. Indirect threat

A major source of breeding failure, is the mass localised, desertions by parents during incubation or brood stage, after which eggs and chicks are predated by skuas and sheathbills (Jouventin and

Weimerskirch 1984). The reason for these desertions is not known.

From the limited dietary data available, it appears that competition for food resources between *P. fusca* and commercial fisheries is not significant.

Ingestion of plastics has been documented for *P. fusca*, with 1 of the 73 samples examined containing plastic particles (Ryan 1987).

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.

Currently being considered by Australia for listing as a *vulnerable* species under the Endangered Species Protection Act 1992.

A management plan for Gough I. was adopted in October 1993.

4.2 International protection status

None known.

4.3. Additional protection needs

Information regarding interactions between *P. fusca* and commercial fishing activities should be collected through greater coverage of specialist seabird scientific observers on boats fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zones of range states and on the high seas. Currently, most observers are present on boats to mainly record target species catch data.

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.

5. Range States (*Breeding Sites)

France*
South Africa*
Unlited Kingdom*
Australia
International Waters (Atlantic, Indian, Southern Oceans)

6. Comments from Range States

7. Additional remarks

Considered to be *near-threatened by* Collar *et al.* (1994).

8. References

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