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REGIONAL REPORT OCEANIA

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Introduction

This report summarises key regional developments and activities in relation to implementation of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) by the Oceania Parties since the 14th Conference of the Parties (COP14, February 2024). Some national initiatives are also included although these will be reported in full later in 2025 in National Reports. This report includes contributions from Australia, Cook Islands, New Zealand and Philippines.

1. Regional policies, programmes or initiatives directly or indirectly relevant to migratory species

East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership - The 12th Meeting of Partners will be held in Cebu City, Philippines between 8 – 14 November 2025. The Partnership, adopted in the list of the World Summit on Sustainable Development as a Type II initiative – an informal and voluntary initiative, aims to protect migratory waterbirds, their habitats and the livelihoods of people dependent upon them.

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) - The Eighth Session of the Meeting of the Parties will be held in Dunedin, New Zealand, from 19 to 23 May 2025. ACAP is a subsidiary agreement to CMS and strives to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels.

Oceania Seabird Symposium - 14-17 April 2025, Auckland, New Zealand - This inaugural Symposium will bring the attention of the international and Oceania community to the importance of seabirds within the world's largest body of water, the Pacific Ocean. The Symposium aims to:

- i) Connect government policy makers, seabird conservation practitioners and scientists, land managers and communities working with seabirds;
- ii) Increase our collective understanding of the value of seabirds to Pacific economies and communities including cultural values;
- iii) Highlight conservation and scientific initiatives currently underway or planned; and
- iv) Provide hands-on training and networking for increasing capacity for monitoring and managing Pacific seabird populations at community and national levels.

Seabird Listing Proposals for COP15 - Under New Zealand's leadership, Oceania Parties are working with CMS Parties from other regions to develop two proposals to list: i) 23 species of gadfly petrels, and ii) flesh-footed shearwaters – on CMS Appendices, for consideration at the 15th Conference of Parties. These proposals will cover some of the rarest seabirds in the world. As fourteen gadfly petrel species covered in the proposal, as well as flesh-footed shearwaters, breed in the Pacific Ocean, this initiative is important to Oceania Parties.

We are in the process of establishing an informal working group of interested Parties and stakeholders to collaborate on the proposals. The group will work together to finalise the proposals in the coming months. If you are interested in joining this working group, please contact Graeme Taylor gtaylor@doc.govt.nz or Alex Macdonald almacdonald@doc.govt.nz.

Efforts to reduce seabird bycatch in regional fisheries management organisations - New Zealand is working within Regional Fisheries Management Organisations to improve seabird bycatch mitigation measures in the Pacific. Over 2025, New Zealand is leading the review of the seabird bycatch mitigation measures in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries

Commission and the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Organisation. The reviews are focused on updating the seabird conservation and management measures to better align with the best available science and advice from ACAP.

International Whaling Commission Workshop on Small Cetaceans of the South Pacific Islands

Following the initiation of a review into Small Cetaceans of the South Pacific Islands in 2022, in February 2024, a workshop was held in Auckland, New Zealand to review current knowledge of the five focal species selected for review in the South Pacific. The aims of this workshop were to: (1) summarise current knowledge of the focal species found within the region; (2) identify knowledge gaps that significantly limit our ability to detect and monitor declines and other conservation issues; and (3) develop a multi-year workplan to address identified knowledge gaps including identification of, and engagement with, stakeholders throughout the region. The workshop was held in collaboration with the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative and stakeholders from the South Pacific Island region, including the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

Enhancing Management of Marine Protected Area Networks

- The Philippines is collaborating with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Center for Biodiversity for the project *Effectively Managing Networks of Marine Protected Areas in Large Marine Ecosystems in the ASEAN Region* (ASEAN ENMAPS) by the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity. The ENMAPS is a five-year initiative that aims to improve the management and governance of marine protected areas and its associated marine corridors in four large marine ecosystems in the ASEAN region (Bay of Bengal, Indonesian Seas, South China Sea, and Sulu-Celebes Sea). It also aims to uphold the ecological connectivity by supporting the management of marine protected area networks within the marine waters of the ASEAN which are home to many migratory species such as marine turtles, marine mammals, sharks and rays, seabirds, and migratory fish.

The Project uses science-based approaches through integrated coastal management, marine spatial planning, and an ecosystems approach to fisheries management to expand marine corridor protection. The project was initiated in March 2024 and is expected to be completed by March 2029 in 11 pilot sites within the three participating countries of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

Declaration of Turtle Islands as an ASEAN Heritage Park

- In November 2024, Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary (TIWS), a member of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia Marine Sea Turtle Site Network, has been recognized as the 60th ASEAN Heritage Park. Turtle Islands was identified as Extremely High for biodiversity conservation and was declared a protected area in 1996 through a Memorandum of Agreement between the Philippines and Malaysia. TIWS is the only major nesting habitat of Green Sea Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) in the Philippines, and the only one in the ASEAN region. Related to the continuing management of the TIWS, the Philippines will be hosting the next bilateral "Meeting of the Malaysia-Philippines Joint Management Committee for the Turtle Island Heritage Protected Area" in Davao City, Philippines on July 15-18, 2025.

Improving Biodiversity Conservation of Wetlands and Migratory Waterbirds in the ASEAN Region – Phase II

- The Philippines is collaborating with the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity for the implementation of this project now on its second phase of implementation since 2023. It focuses on sustaining the ASEAN Flyway Network as well as in enhancing capacities for waterbird and wetland monitoring at both regional and national levels among selected ASEAN member countries. Six migratory bird sites which are of international importance (Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary, Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary, Panabo and Carmen coastal wetland, Negros Occidental Wetland and Conservation Area, Lake Mainit, and Sibugay Wetlands) have been selected for support in terms of strengthening management and improving baseline information. Sibugay Wetlands has recently been designated as Ramsar

site for its significance as migratory waterbird congregation site. The initiative is supported by the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity and led by the National Parks Board of Singapore.

Collaboration with the Asian Development Bank on the Regional Flyway Initiative - The Philippines is collaborating with the Asian Development Bank for the implementation of the Regional Flyway Initiative. The Regional Flyway Initiative seeks to mobilise investments to protect, restore, and sustainably manage network of natural wetlands along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. The large-scale regional program aims to preserve their globally significant biodiversity values and the ecosystem services and benefits they provide. The Philippines has apportioned \$3 Million from its GEF-8 cycle budget allocation to support the initial implementation of the Regional Flyway Initiative in the Philippines to focus on nature-based restoration and enhancing site management of selected wetlands of international importance to migratory waterbirds.

2. Key legislative, administrative or policy national measures on migratory species

Australia

National Guidelines for the Survey of Cetaceans, Marine Turtle and Dugong - The Australian Government has finalized the development of the National Guidelines for the Survey of Cetaceans, Marine Turtles and the Dugong (2023). The Guidelines provide guidance and advice on best practice in-water survey techniques for these species, which are listed as protected matters under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The guidelines can be found here: [National Guidelines for the Survey of Cetaceans, Marine Turtles and the Dugong - DCCEEW](#)

National Guidelines for the Monitoring of Nesting Marine Turtles - The Australian Government is developing National Guidelines for the Monitoring of Nesting Marine Turtles. A standardised monitoring framework would enable data sharing and comparison of data across regions, which in turn facilitates reporting and decision-making processes. It is anticipated that the guidelines will be shared for information with the Scientific Council when finalised.

National Recovery Plan for the Southern Right Whale - In 2024 the Australian Government published the new National Recovery Plan for the Southern Right Whale, listed on Appendix I of CMS and a listed threatened and migratory species (endangered) under Australian environment law. The recovery plan considers the conservation requirements of the species across its range and identifies the main threats to the species survival including climate change impacts, entanglement, habitat loss, anthropogenic underwater noise and vessel strike. It also identifies actions to stop the decline and support the recovery of the species to maximise its chances of long-term survival in nature. The plan can be accessed here: [National Recovery Plan for the Southern Right Whale \(Eubalaena australis\) - DCCEEW](#)

Marine Initiatives - The Australian Government also has a number of national ocean-related initiatives that provide both direct and in-direct benefits for migratory species:

- *The Ocean Leadership Package (OLP)* has four elements to build the ocean's health and resilience while supporting jobs and economic activities, including funding to support on-ground activities to protect threatened and migratory marine species, including marine turtles, shorebirds and cetaceans, from threats such as bycatch, light pollution, anthropogenic underwater noise and climate change. The light pollution mitigation grants program under OLP was completed in June 2024 and marine turtle grants for climate change adaptation under OLP will be finalised in June 2025.
- *The Ghost Nets Initiative* tackles the issue of ghost nets and plastic litter in the waters and beaches of northern Australia. This initiative received funding from the Australian

Government and continues to be a community-based collaboration between Indigenous people, community groups and sea rangers.

- A number of projects are being progressed on marine turtle and dugong monitoring and management. These projects focus on turtle nest protection actions, predator control, dugong aerial surveys, habitat surveys, enhancing AI detection for monitoring of marine megafauna, and enabling Indigenous-led monitoring in northern Australia. The outcomes of these projects will be shared through CMS where relevant.
- The Australian Government is also supporting initiatives that increase the uptake of electronic and vessel monitoring systems by commercial fishers who operate in or transit in Australian Marine Parks.

CMS Energy Task Force - The Australian Government has provided a \$200,000 (AUD) voluntary contribution to the CMS Energy Task Force to be directed towards a review of leading global practice in regulation for onshore windfarms, considering conditioning, management, innovation and technology, including with consideration of its application in Australia.

The Australian Government has provided an additional \$120,000 (AUD) voluntary contribution to undertake a desktop review of international and domestic research to understand and identify marine taxa at risk of impact from artificial light from offshore developments which are not currently covered in the 2023 National Light Pollution Guidelines for Wildlife, including (but not limited to) marine mammals.

Cook Islands

National Environment Policy 2022-32 is the central policy document for environmental conservation planning and priority setting for the Cook Islands. One of the main objectives of the policy to protect, conserve and manage the ecological systems, biodiversity and environment resources throughout the Cook Islands. It provides detailed material on biodiversity and species protection including migratory species and their habitats, to respond to changing conditions and emerging pressures.

The Environment Bill 2024/25, currently in its public consultation phase, recognises migratory species as an important species for protection as well as their habitat.

Marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Treaty - While recognising the Cook Islands Exclusive Economic Zone is a corridor for marine migratory species the Cook Islands reaffirmed its commitment to the treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of marine Biodiversity in areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ treaty). Assessments and coordination in country conducted to have a better understanding of the BBNJ agreement among stakeholders as well as an analysis of national situation with respect to the use of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction and potential implications.

New Zealand

West-Pacific leatherback turtles survey - The Department of Conservation Conservation Services Programme has commissioned a consortium of researchers, led by Upwell Turtles in the United States (US), to conduct an aerial survey of West-Pacific leatherback turtles in waters off the east coast of New Zealand in March 2025. These turtles are critically endangered and some visit New Zealand waters to feed during their long migrations to and from the US West Coast and nesting beaches in the Indo-Pacific region. Leatherbacks are interacting with New Zealand commercial fisheries. We aim to collect fishery independent data on the distribution, relative abundance, and size of leatherback turtles to inform national and

regional risk assessments and mitigation measures to avoid or reduce commercial fishery interactions.

Philippines

Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP) - The Philippines has completed the series of stakeholder consultations for the updating of the PBSAP in order to align the country's biodiversity targets with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (KMGBF). Among the identified priority targets include enhancing ecological connectivity by strengthening protection of habitats for migratory species. Upon its finalisation, the national plan shall be adopted by the President through an executive issuance.

National Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration and Species Extinction Prevention (NAPERSEP) - The Philippines is in the process of finalising the NAPERSEP which shall serve as a supplement to the PBSAP and is in response to Target 4 of the KMGBF. The NAPERSEP is a holistic and overarching framework which aims to address species extinction and includes priority actions for migratory species such as sharks, marine turtles, dugong and migratory waterbirds.

Guidelines on the Protection of Marine Turtle Nesting Habitats - These Guidelines were developed to provide guidance on the validation of reported nesting beaches for priority protection and present management options, including possible activities for these nesting sites.

Approval of the interim Guidelines on the issuance of Environmental Compliance Certificate under the Philippine Environmental Impact System for Offshore Wind Energy Projects - These Guidelines providing considerations on the appropriate location and measures to avoid impact of such projects to marine wildlife and ecosystems.

Measures for marine wildlife interaction - In February 2025, the Local Government of the Province of Bohol, a renowned tourist destination, took bold action to protect its tourism industry and enforce the law against feeding migratory marine wildlife by suspending all whale shark interaction activities in the province. The suspension shall remain enforced until operators are ready to comply with the appropriate measures for marine wildlife interaction as set forth in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Tourism, Department of Agriculture Joint Administrative Order on Marine Wildlife Interaction.

3. Planned activities and current policy, institutional or administrative issues, including those that could benefit from other regional views or where targeted assistance is required.

Cook Islands

The Cook Islands is currently reviewing its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and is working with stakeholders to refine the document and to ensure it aligns with sector and national plans as well as to international plans in particular to the Global Biodiversity Framework which links to CMS strategic plan.

Rarotonga Southern Passage environment management plan was developed due to the ongoing concerns raised by communities on the impact caused by tourism operators in the passage conducting turtle tours. These include overcrowding and disturbance to turtles and their habitat. The management plans sets key recommendations to ensure turtles and their habitat are protected and proper management and compliance is carried out by tour operators.

Responsible tourism - A memorandum of understanding on best practice advice and guidelines, as well as visitor messaging to encourage responsible decision-making was carried out between tour operators and Cook Islands Tourism and a number of operators have signed the MOU.

Invasive species

- The island of Palmerston has been declared as rat free island by National Environment Service Cook Islands and New Zealand Department of Conservation in 2024. The declaration of the island as rat free provides direct benefits to migratory birds and those that live on the island.
- The island of Atiu has been declared in 2024 as a mynah bird free island following 4 years with no mynah bird presence on the island. The eradication of mynah birds provides migratory species more territory to move around on the island.
- A program to control invasive species on the islands of Atiu and Mauke is planned to commence in 2025. Of importance and benefit to migratory species is the control of wild pigs on Atiu. The reduction of the number of wild pigs will provide migratory birds a better environment.

A Convention on the Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) gaps analysis is being conducted to determine the costs and benefits of the Cook Islands becoming a Party to CITES as some migratory species are listed under CITES.

National Coastal fisheries policy is currently being reviewed by the Ministry of Marine Resources will provide direct and indirect benefits for migratory species once endorsed.

A program to monitor, manage and assess breeding distribution and threats on bird species is being conducted through the use of acoustic recorders and motion cameras for two years.