

PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP AN IATTC SEABIRD WORK PLAN

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SUMMARY

The development and adoption of a seabird strategy and action plan is proposed. This strategy should be informed by relevant IATTC Resolutions to reduce levels of seabird bycatch across its fisheries, and the large volume of work likely to be presented at the newly formed Working Group on Ecosystems and Bycatch plus other relevant information. This will facilitate a strategic and co-ordinated approach to seabird bycatch management in IATTC convention area.

KEYWORDS

IATTC, tuna fisheries, Eastern Pacific Ocean, seabird, bycatch.

1. Introduction

IATTC has recognised that their fisheries are having a measurable and concerning impact on seabird species, and thus the need to reduce seabird bycatch in these fisheries. IATTC has adopted measures to achieve the aim of reducing seabird bycatch, namely Resolution C-11-02. This Resolution outlines technical specifications of seabird bycatch mitigation measures that vessels are required to implement in defined areas, the assessment of seabird bycatch, and the implementation of National Plans of Action (NPOAs) for Reducing Incidental Catches of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries by CPCs. Furthermore, CPCs are encouraged to adopt measures aimed at ensuring that seabirds captured alive are released in the best condition possible and to undertake research to further develop and refine methods for mitigating seabird bycatch. In addition, the Resolution C-19-08 determines that data on incidental catch of seabirds by species should be recorded through on-board observers and reported annually.

Over the years, seabird bycatch has been a standing item on the agenda of IATTC's Bycatch Working Group (the precursor the Working Group on Ecosystems and Bycatch), and CPC scientists and others have presented a large volume of work dealing with seabird bycatch, its mitigation, assessment and monitoring. This has included the results of studies to quantify the effectiveness of current or new technical bycatch mitigation measures, guidelines for the collection and reporting of seabird bycatch and associated data from observer programmes, risk assessment approaches, information from observer programmes that has been used to monitor bycatch levels over time, best practice protocols for handling seabirds, and approaches for improving the identification of incidentally caught seabirds, amongst others.

2. Proposal

With the context outlined in Section 1, we propose that a multi-year seabird strategy and action plan be developed to help guide and evaluate efforts to reduce seabird bycatch in IATTC fisheries. Such a plan could:

1. Serve as a tool to underpin an adaptive approach to the management of seabird bycatch.
2. Ensure that the various actions and initiatives relating to seabird bycatch mitigation are clearly articulated, prioritised, routinely monitored and, where necessary, modified.
3. Facilitate a collaborative, co-ordinated and informed approach to seabird bycatch management by IATTC and others.

The plan would be informed by the relevant IATTC Resolutions and would also serve to provide the linkages to other IATTC work, and indeed "external", wider-scale seabird bycatch related initiatives.

The objectives and actions for such a plan might include, but not be limited to, the following aspects:

- § Facilitate a link between the outputs of ongoing and new research and the review of seabird conservation measures, as well as the assessment of seabird bycatch in IATTC fisheries, both outlined in Resolution C-11-02.
- § Support and monitor the implementation of NPoAs by CPCs, as outlined in Resolution C-11-02.
- § Reflect on the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna multi-year seabird strategy (adopted at their 2019 Commission meeting), aspects of which could be considered in developing an IATTC-specific strategy, and with which synergies can be realised.

Pulling together the various initiatives (and their outputs) that have been undertaken, and continue to be progressed, into a coherent plan will help facilitate an efficient and effective approach to this task. As indicated, the plan would helpfully identify priority areas and actions, as well as roles and responsibilities.