



Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

Second Meeting of Advisory Committee

Brasilia, Brazil, 5 – 8 June 2006

**OBSERVER REPORT ON THE MEETING OF THE STOCK
ASSESSMENT WORKING GROUP (SAWG) OF THE
INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
(IATTC), 15-19 May, 2006, La Jolla, California, USA**

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Agenda Item No 5

OBSERVER REPORT ON THE MEETING OF THE STOCK ASSESSMENT WORKING GROUP (SAWG) OF THE INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION (IATTC), 15-19 May, 2006, La Jolla, California, USA

Background

The meeting of the Stock Assessment Working Group (SAWG) of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) was held 15-19 May, 2006 in La Jolla, California, USA. The meeting was attended by 20 to 30 participants. The meeting report will be posted at the IATTC website <http://www.iattc.org/> once it is available.

The ACAP Secretariat had asked the USA to act as an observer for the meeting of the IATTC's Bycatch Working Group (BWG). This group meets 24 June 2006 in Busan, Korea, followed by the IATTC Commission meeting 26-30 June 2006. Given that seabird incidental catch was on the SAWG agenda, we are using this opportunity to report to ACAP with a summary of the SAWG meeting.

The SAWG is to provide a peer review of the staff stock assessments, to give the scientists of delegations an in-depth view of the staff's stock assessments, and to review the advice and recommendations from the staff. In recent years the Commission has asked that various other matters be reviewed by the Working Group. This year, the agenda included discussion of the impact of incidental catch of seabirds and identification of geographic areas where there could be interactions. This topic follows directly from the IATTC Resolution C-05-01 "Resolution on Incidental Mortality of Seabirds" adopted at its annual meeting in 2005. See <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds/actionplans.htm#intl> for a posting of all the RFMO seabird resolutions.

Three contributed papers and one staff paper were presented on this topic. All are posted at <http://www.iattc.org/IATTCandAIDCPMeetingMay06ENG.htm> The following summary is mostly taken from the Meeting Report. Dr. Cleo Small, BirdLife International, presented SAR-7-05b "Analysis of albatross and petrel distribution within the IATTC area: results from the Global *Procellariiform* Tracking Database". The IATTC area overlaps with 5% of global breeding distribution of albatrosses and petrels, reflecting the fact that there are few breeding sites within the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). The highest overlap is with the breeding distribution of waved albatross (*Phoebastria irrorata*) in the Galápagos Islands, and with the small population of Laysan albatross (*P. immutabilis*) from Isla de Guadalupe, Mexico. The results also emphasize the importance of the IATTC area for non-breeding albatrosses and petrels, including 36% of the non-breeding distribution of black-footed albatross (*P. nigripes*). Data being collected by the Tagging of Pacific Pelagics program indicate that non-breeding Laysan albatross also disperse into the IATTC area. In the South Pacific, the IATTC area overlaps with over 50% of the non-breeding distribution of black-browed albatross (*Thalassarche melanophrys*) from Chile, and with over 50% of the non-breeding distribution of several albatross species from New Zealand (Chatham albatross *T. eremita*, Buller's albatross *T. bulleri*, and Salvin's albatross, *T. salvini*), which migrate across the South Pacific to the rich foraging grounds in the Humboldt Current. The

distribution is mostly concentrated within EEZs, but includes some high seas areas. The distributions of many albatross species span both the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and IATTC Convention Areas, indicating the potential benefit of coordination among the two Commissions to assess and address seabird bycatch in the Pacific.

Dr. Scott (IATTC) presented SAR-7-10 “Distribution and Vulnerability to Bycatch of Seabirds”. IATTC has two data sets that can provide information on seabird mortality: the IATTC observer database, which has data on seabird sightings associated with purse-seine sets, and longline effort data in the EPO provided by the fishery. While seabird mortalities are not recorded by IATTC observers during purse-seine sets because it is an exceedingly rare event, the sightings data provide information on seabird distributions. By overlaying the distribution plots for particularly vulnerable seabird species (such as albatrosses) on longline effort, areas of potential vulnerability can be identified. The area of most concern based on this approach is between the Galápagos Islands and mainland South America where the distribution of the longline fishery overlaps that of the waved albatross.

Ms. Rivera (USA) presented “Seabirds and Fisheries in the IATTC Area” (Document SAR-07-05c) which addressed: indirect and direct fishery effects on seabirds within the IATTC Area, some of the key affected seabird species, monitoring bycatch, known bycatch estimates, mitigation measures required in some USA fisheries, and priorities for scientific research activities. Information was presented in the context of IATTC’s Resolution C-05-01 on seabirds and the USA’s implementation of the FAO’s International Plan of Action on Seabirds. The conservation status of several key seabird species was reviewed (short-tailed albatross *P. albatrus*, black-footed albatross, Laysan albatross, waved albatross, and black petrel *Procellaria parkinsoni*). Seabird bycatch estimates for various USA longline fisheries were presented and ranged from 0.23 birds to 0.004 birds per 1,000 hooks, partly depending on whether or not mitigation measures are used. Bycatch of the waved albatross in EPO fisheries off South America appears to contribute to recent and dramatic declines of the breeding population. Recent mitigation trials and research in Hawaii and Alaska have resulted in mandatory requirements for mitigation measures in these respective longline fisheries, side-setting and paired streamer lines. Several other research efforts for pelagic longline gear are underway (underwater bait-setting capsule, streamer line system, underwater setting chute, and bait-setting pod). A couple of population modeling efforts are underway (one by IATTC staff) to assess whether past and present levels of bycatch are likely to affect significantly the populations of black-footed and Laysan albatross. Priorities for scientific research on seabirds include collection of seabird bycatch data by observers, data analysis of seabird flock associations with tuna schools in the ETP, improved understanding of the movements and the overlap of albatrosses with fisheries, and continued development of seabird mitigation measures for pelagic longline vessels.

Dr. Dai (China) presented “Observations of Seabird Bycatch in the Chinese Longline Fishery in the IATTC Waters” (Document SAR-07-05e). The Chinese tuna fleet targets bigeye tuna in the EPO, and observers have been collecting bycatch data since 2003.

During a four-month cruise in 2003, the incidental mortality of six seabirds was recorded either due to diving on baited hooks or by weather-related collisions with the vessel. The mortalities involved two species of petrel and the blue-footed booby.

There was considerable discussion about the seabird presentations. Seasonal variability is typically great for seabird distribution data. Bycatch analyses could be improved by using spatial and temporal bycatch data. Some participants requested standard protocols for recording seabird bycatch and for identifying seabirds, which Ms. Rivera offered to provide. It was mentioned that some of the small longline vessels in Ecuador and Peru use side-setting methods, which minimizes seabird bycatch. IATTC staff will use information from these seabird papers to present an overview document on seabirds that may interact with the EPO fisheries to the IATTC Bycatch Working Group and to the Commission (this document will be posted on the IATTC website once it is available). Collaboration with the other tuna commissions to avoid duplication of efforts was especially encouraged, given that seabirds are highly migratory.

SAWG recommendations to the Commission included: the Commission coordinate with the WCPFC, and other tuna RFMOs as appropriate, in its implementation of seabird resolutions and the development of scientific information and reports that support this implementation. This could include practical areas of cooperation on the mitigation of seabird bycatch; and the IATTC should develop, in coordination with the other RFMOs, a strategy to mitigate bycatches in the different fisheries involved. The program should include standardization of data collection (whenever possible), discussion of research programs and activities to be undertaken in each, and a mechanism for the timely sharing of results. This item could be included in the agenda of the upcoming Kobe meeting (meeting of the 5 tuna RFMOs in January 2007).