



Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

Second Meeting of Advisory Committee

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**REPORT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA ON THE
CONSERVATION OF ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS ON ITS
EFFORTS IN IMPLEMENTING THE AGREEMENT'S ACTION
PLAN**

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REPORT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE SECOND MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS ON ITS EFFORTS IN IMPLEMENTING THE AGREEMENT'S ACTION PLAN

Note: This report follows the format of the Agreement's Action Plan, reporting on South African efforts in implementation under those heads for which significant activities have taken place, as recommended in Annex 11 of the report of the First Meeting of the ACAP Advisory Committee. The reporting period covered is approximately from January 2005 to April 2006.

Outline of planned actions for national implementation over the next three years

Details of planned actions are given in the various sections below. In summary, they include changes to the national and international conservation status of the Prince Edward Islands, including the declaration of a large Marine Protected Area and production of a new Environmental Management Plan; efforts towards the eradication of introduced House Mice at Marion Island; new and ongoing research projects at the island group and in sub-Antarctic and continental waters; adoption of regulations and ongoing research to mitigate incidental mortality in longline and trawl fisheries; and efforts to disseminate information on the conservation of albatrosses and petrels to the general public within South Africa.

Species conservation

Species conservation

The existing Sea Birds and Seals Protection Act of 1973 is in the process of being replaced with a new Act, which is being drafted. The current and anticipated Acts afford full protection to all seabirds breeding at the Prince Edward Islands (Marion and Prince Edward), thus including species listed within ACAP. Additionally, all seabirds are protected within South African territorial and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) waters. All ACAP species recorded within South African waters are therefore fully protected, whether they are South African breeding species or not. No exemptions have been issued in the period under review.

Non-native taxa

The South African National Antarctic Programme (SANAP) of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) has adopted strict quarantine measures to halt the introduction all forms of alien biota, including rodents, to its sub-Antarctic Prince Edward Islands (home of nine breeding ACAP species). Procedures include provision of rodent traps at packing stores and aboard supply vessels. Additionally, the main supply vessel, the *SA Agulhas*, is fumigated against rodents and invertebrates

prior to sailing to the Prince Edward Islands, and all its mooring lines carry rat guards while in port.

The above procedures are codified in the new Environmental Management Plan (EMP) for the Prince Edward Islands, currently before the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism for adoption.

SANAP has commissioned an eradication feasibility study of the introduced House Mouse *Mus musculus* at Marion Island, which commenced in April 2006. Part of the study includes assessing non-target poisoning risks to seabirds at the island, including giant petrels *Macronectes* spp. In 2006, observations are being made to assess whether mice are attacking albatross chicks, as has been recorded for Gough Island. If the feasibility study reports positively, it is then intended to proceed to the production of an operational plan for eradication of mice on the island. In addition efforts are underway to eradicate several species of introduced plants and an invertebrate at Marion Island.

Habitat conservation and restoration

Land-based conservation

Several initiatives are underway to improve the conservation status of the Prince Edward Islands. The islands are declared Special Nature Reserves in terms of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act of 2003 (NEMPA), South Africa's highest level of environmental protection, equivalent to a IUCN Category 1a (strict/scientific nature reserve). The new EMP sets out very detailed procedures for environmental protection (see specific details below). Additionally, in 2006 South Africa nominated the island group to both the Ramsar (Wetlands of International Importance) and World Heritage Conventions.

Conservation of marine habitats

South Africa has announced its intention of declaring a large Marine Protected Area (MPA) around the Prince Edward Islands. Planning for this is now well advanced and promulgation is expected during the course of the year. The proposed MPA boundaries extend to the limit of EEZ waters (200 nautical miles) and will include several areas (including all territorial waters out to 12 nm) in which no commercial activities, such as fishing, will be allowed, equivalent to an IUCN category 1a reserve.

The South African longline fishery for Patagonian Toothfish *Dissostichus eleginoides* in the vicinity of the Prince Edward Islands is managed in terms of CCAMLR regulations, including in relation to reducing incidental mortality of seabirds. An exception is that no closed summer season is observed.

Pelagic and demersal longline fisheries within South African continental waters require the adoption of mitigation measures, such as the use of bird-scaring lines, setting only after dark and weighting regimes that ensure maximum line sink rates. At present no precise weighting regime or sink rate is prescribed. Offal must be discarded on the opposite side to hauling. As of 1 January 2006, bird-scaring lines

were recommended for use in the demersal trawl fishery and are presently under review. The aim is for this to be enforceable from 1 July 2006.

A new deep-water fisheries protection vessel, the *Sarah Baartman*, occasionally patrols sub-Antarctic waters, and three smaller fisheries protection vessels patrol continental waters.

South Africa has produced a draft FAO National Plan of Action – Seabirds, currently under consideration within DEAT, which covers all South African longline (but not trawl) fisheries. The NPOA-Seabirds set a maximum level of 0.05 birds/1000 hooks.

Management of human activities

Incidental mortality in fisheries

In addition to the several marine-based activities and initiatives mentioned above, South Africa is actively involved in conducting research designed to reduce incidental mortality in both longline and trawl fisheries in continental waters. The BirdLife Global Seabird Programme has placed two instructors to work with longline fisheries, both at sea conducting mitigation trials as well as on land educating fishers and observers. BirdLife and the Percy FitzPatrick Institute have also conducted an assessment of seabird bycatch in the mid-water and demersal trawl fisheries. Significant bycatch was recorded in the demersal fishery and mitigation trials are underway. These include the testing of bird-scaring lines as well as the development of new measures.

South Africa's new fisheries protection vessels allow for patrols in both sub-Antarctic and continental waters to combat IUU fishing.

Pollutants and marine debris

South Africa abides by the requirements of MARPOL (International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships) and its Annex V on disposal of plastics, and of the London Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter, to which it is signatory. Beach litter and nest pollutants in the form of discarded fishing hooks and lines are recorded and collected at Marion Island.

Discarding longline fishing hooks is not allowed in terms of CCAMLR regulations by the toothfish fishery around the Prince Edward Islands.

Disturbance

The Environmental Management Plan for the Prince Edward Islands sets out detailed procedures to reduce disturbance to seabirds. No breeding ACAP species may be approached closer than 15 m without permit; all Southern Giant Petrel *M. giganteus* colonies are protected by being placed within a specially protected zone and approach without permit closer than 100 m is not allowed. Additionally, courting Wandering Albatrosses *Diomedea exulans* may not be approached closer than 50 m. Certain

albatross colonies utilized for long-term demographic studies are also zoned as specially protected and entry and approach to less than 200 m without permit is not allowed. Permits are only issued for *bona fide* research and management purposes.

Research at Marion Island is currently being conducted on the effects of human disturbance on selected species of seabirds, including surface-breeding ACAP species. Studies have included monitoring heart rates and behavioural responses to approaches by researchers at different speeds and group size.

Tourism is not permitted within a Special Nature Reserve in terms of NEMPA, so none takes place at the Prince Edward Islands.

Research conducted on ACAP species at the Prince Edward Islands requires the approval of proposed projects by SANAP, and the prior approval of university ethics committees and the Prince Edward Islands Management Committee (PEIMC). The requirements of issued permits are monitored by conservation officers appointed on the advice of the PEIMC during annual relief voyages to Marion Island.

Research and monitoring

Research and monitoring is conducted on all ACAP species breeding at the Prince Edward Islands, concentrating on the surface-nesting species. Long-term demographic studies are undertaken on Wandering and Grey-headed *Thalassarche chrysostoma* Albatrosses and on Northern Giant Petrels *M. halli*. Annual complete-island censuses are made of breeding numbers of all surface-breeding ACAP species at Marion Island, and less regularly (roughly every five years) at Prince Edward Island. White-chinned Petrels *Procellaria aequinoctialis* are monitored by call playback to obtain an indication of breeding numbers and success. In 2006, remote cameras (“burrow cams”) will be placed in burrows of winter-breeding Grey Petrels *P. cinerea* at Marion Island to look for signs of predation by mice.

A two-year project to determine the effects of various types of human disturbance (humans on foot, research activities and helicopter operations) on key species of surface-nesting seabirds on Marion Island nears completion (see above).

A new project, commenced in 2006, aims to describe individual-level variation in reproductive output based on existing long-term colony data for Wandering Albatrosses at Marion Island and to quantify patterns of mate choice (fidelity, divorce and opportunism) in a population believed to be skewed to an abundance of males (due to higher levels of longline-induced mortality among the more northerly-foraging females).

Research has also been conducted on movements at sea by the use of remote-tracking devices on breeding Wandering and Grey-headed Albatrosses at Marion Island. Non-breeding Black-browed *T. melanophrys* and Shy *T. cauta* Albatrosses caught in South African continental waters are being satellite-tracked to assess their distributions in relation to fishing activity.

Data on incidental mortality from longline and trawl fisheries are collected by observers in both sub-Antarctic and continental waters. Toothfish vessels carry observers who follow CCAMLR procedures. Observers are placed on 20% of trips conducted by South African flagged vessels and 100% of trips conducted by foreign flagged vessels operating within the continental EEZ. Birdlife has placed four trained observers to collect specialized information (one midwater trawl, one demersal trawl and two longline).

The following institutions and other bodies are involved with the conservation of albatrosses and petrels within South Africa:

Avian Demography Unit, Department of Statistical Sciences, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa. Contacts: John Cooper; jcooper@adu.uct.ac.za & Marianne de Villiers; mdevill@adu.uct.ac.za

BirdLife/WWF Responsible Fisheries Programme, BirdLife South Africa, Room 2.17, Percy FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town. Contact: Samantha Petersen; seabirds@birdlife.org.za Tel: 073 237 8185

DST-NRF Centre of Excellence at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa. Contact: Peter Ryan; pryan@botzoo.uct.ac.za

Marine & Coastal Management, Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism, Pvt Bag X2, Roggebaai 8012, South Africa. Contact: Robert Crawford; crawford@deat.gov.za

Prince Edward Islands Management Committee, c/o Directorate: Antarctica & Islands, Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism, Pvt Bag X447, Roggebaai 8012, South Africa. Contact: Henry Valentine; hvalentine@deat.gov.za

Education and public awareness

Popular articles are regularly written for various media on aspects of the conservation of ACAP species that occur within South African territory and waters. The opportunity was given in April-May 2006 to a children's author to visit Marion Island to gather information and impressions for a book on Wandering Albatrosses, to be entitled "Allie the Albatross", that will deal with such issues as longline mortality.

A Birdlife/WWF Responsible Fisheries Programme undertakes training of fishery observers, fisheries law-enforcement officers and fishing skippers on seabird identification and the use of mitigation measures, such as bird-scaring lines. A training course and training materials have been developed. This programme has also developed an awareness brochure designed to assist fishers understand the issue, the use of mitigation measures and how to release live birds.

SANAP appoints a Conservation Officer for its annual relief voyages to the Prince Edward Islands, whose duties include education (see above).

Implementation

Collaboration on at-sea research on albatrosses takes place between the Percy FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town and the United Kingdom (British Antarctic Survey). Further collaborations on at-sea remote tracking are planned with Australia (Chisolm Institute) and Japan (National Institute of Polar Research).

Korean joint-venture longline vessels licensed to fish within South African continental waters have South African observers aboard. High levels of seabird mortality (especially of Shy Albatrosses and White-chinned Petrels) have occurred on these vessels. Education and providing bird-scaring lines to these vessels have thus far proven unfruitful.

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Awareness Brochure

Keeping our endangered marine life off the hook: Benefits to fishers and marine life. Available in English and Portuguese. Produced by BirdLife/WWF Responsible Fisheries Programme.

Training manual and identification guide

A practical guide to understanding and reducing vulnerable bycatch. Available in English and Portuguese. Produced by BirdLife/WWF Responsible Fisheries Programme.