



Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

Fourth Meeting of Advisory Committee

Cape Town, South Africa, 22 – 25 August 2008

Implementation Report – South Africa

Author: South Africa

AC4 Doc 38
Agenda Item No. 7.1

**REPORT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE
FOURTH 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 November 2006 to March 2008.

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 finalizing a FAO National Plan of Action – Seabirds; new and ongoing research and monitoring 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. In 2007, South Africa adopted a *Policy on the Management of Seals, Seabirds and Shorebirds*, which will guide development of the new Act. 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 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. 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. The EMP is currently under consideration before final adoption as a legal document.

SANAP 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. Observations have confirmed that mice attack albatross chicks, as had been recorded for Gough Island, and frequently enter the burrows of species, including White-chinned Petrels, that nest beneath the surface.

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 an IUCN Category 1a (strict/scientific nature reserve). The new EMP sets out procedures for environmental protection (see specific details below).

On 22 May 2007, South Africa announced the listing of its sub-Antarctic Prince Edward Islands under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat of 1971 (commonly known as the Ramsar Convention). This is South Africa's 19th Ramsar site and its first away from the African Continent. It is the first ever Ramsar site to be situated in the sub-Antarctic Region, although it is not the farthest south. The successful submission of the islands to the Convention was an initiative of the Prince Edward Islands Management Committee. The new Ramsar Site consists of the whole of the terrestrial areas of the islands of Marion and Prince Edward, along with a 500-m-wide intertidal and kelp-bed zone around each island. The site is listed under Ramsar Criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. The designated wetland categories include non-forested peat lands (swamps and bogs), intermittent streams, waterfalls, fresh-water ponds, crater lakes, sea cliffs, rocky marine shores and kelp beds.

Conservation of marine habitats

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. In the demersal trawl fishery it is required that vessels fly bird-scaring lines outside the trawl warps.

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.

Consideration of proclaiming a marine protected area around the Prince Edward Islands is continuing.

Management of human activities

Incidental mortality in fisheries

South Africa is actively involved in conducting research designed to reduce incidental mortality in both longline and trawl fisheries in continental waters. In April 2007, WWF and BirdLife South Africa published *Towards an Ecosystem Approach to Longline Fisheries in the Benguela: An Assessment of Impacts on Seabirds, Sea Turtles and Sharks* (Petersen S, Nel D, Omardien A; WWF South Africa Report Series 2007/Marine/001). This included a chapter on development of mitigation measures to reduce seabird mortality in longline fisheries.

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 and related 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 on variability in responses of Wandering Albatrosses to pedestrian approaches was undertaken by MS de Villiers (Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town). History of disturbance was the factor that best explained variability in behavioural responses.

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 are conducted on nearly all the ACAP species breeding at the Prince Edward Islands, concentrating on the surface-nesting species at Marion Island. Long-term demographic studies following individually banded birds are undertaken on Wandering and Grey-headed *Thalassarche chrysostoma* Albatrosses and on Northern Giant Petrel *M. halli*. Annual complete-island censuses are made of breeding numbers of all surface-breeding ACAP species at Marion Island, and intermittently at Prince Edward Island. White-chinned Petrels *Procellaria aequinoctialis* are monitored by call playback to obtain an indication of breeding numbers and success.

Research has 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. It is intended also to track movements of Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross *T. carteri*, Dark-mantled Sooty Albatross *Phoebetria fusca*, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross *P. palpebrata*, Southern Giant Petrel *M. giganteus* and Northern Giant Petrel.

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:

Animal Demography Unit, Department of Zoology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa. Contacts: John Cooper; john.cooper@uct.ac.za & Marianne de Villiers; marianne.devilliers@uct.ac.za.

BirdLife/WWF Responsible Fisheries Programme, BirdLife South Africa, Room 2.17, Percy FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town. Contact: Barry Watkins; 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; peter.ryan@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.

WWF South Africa, Private Bag X2, Die Boord, 7613, South Africa. Contacts: Deon Nel; dnel@wwf.org.za & Samantha Petersen; spetersen@wwf.org.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.

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.

Implementation

Foreign joint-venture longline vessels are licensed to fish within South African continental waters. High levels of seabird mortality have occurred on these vessels and seabird catch limitations have now been imposed.

Awareness Brochure

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