



**Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels**

**Fifth Meeting of Advisory Committee**

*Mar del Plata, Argentina, 13 – 17 April 2010*

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**Framework for Identification of ACAP Conservation  
Priorities**

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# Framework for Identification of ACAP Conservation Priorities

## Executive summary

This paper describes a framework to help ACAP to set objective, systematic and consistent priorities for actions to address threats to albatrosses and petrels.

Priority setting is both necessary and beneficial. It is necessary because ACAP is constrained by limited funding, knowledge and resources. It is also beneficial because of the complexity and diversity of management actions required to achieve a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels.

The fourth meeting of the ACAP Advisory Committee (AC4) noted that there was considerable merit in developing a priority setting framework to help Parties to implement the Agreement more effectively. An ad-hoc Working Group on Priorities (PWG), convened by New Zealand, was established to deliver a framework for prioritising conservation actions.

The approach taken by the PWG uses a quantitative assessment methodology to determine priorities. Scores are assigned to variables relating to the vulnerability of a particular seabird population, the severity of threat faced by that population and the likelihood of success of taking management action. Management actions with similar scores are then grouped together and assigned a rank accordingly, such as “Highest priority”.

Important applications deriving from this analysis and approach include the ability to:

- develop an effective work plan that clearly identifies the most important and urgent tasks, and brings together different types of work, such as capacity building, research and engagement with RFMOs;
- improve the coordination of key aspects of the work of the Advisory Committee and its Working Groups, including by providing the opportunity for focussed reporting on work items to the Advisory Committee and to the Meeting of Parties; and
- highlight important gaps in data and knowledge;

## Recommendations

The Advisory Committee is requested to:

- **note** progress achieved to date on prioritising conservation actions for ACAP listed species
- **agree** that the framework should guide the work of ACAP and Parties when considering management action, data collection, research programmes, capacity building initiatives and reporting requirements, as set out in the primary and secondary objectives described in this paper
- **agree** to complete the further work described in the next steps section of this paper

## **Purpose**

This paper describes a framework to help ACAP and its Parties to systematically and consistently set priorities for actions to address threats to albatrosses and petrels.

## **Background**

Two papers were developed and presented to the fourth meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC4) relating to priority setting:

- AC4 Doc 15, by New Zealand, which set out principles for prioritising management action and a proposed methodology at a species level; and
- AC4 Doc 48, by ACAP officials, which sought to develop a methodology for identifying conservation issues at a population or species level that needed to be addressed as a high priority.

Both papers were considered at the Status and Trends and the Breeding Sites Working Group meetings, in the days prior to AC4. It was agreed that both papers contained valuable ideas and it was clear that these ideas needed to be brought together.

To that end, a small group convened by New Zealand met during the Advisory Committee meeting to develop a prioritisation framework for both land and sea based threats that brought together the best components of each paper. This combined approach was presented to AC4, who supported ongoing work in this area and accepted the offer from New Zealand to continue to lead the process, with the support of members of the Advisory Committee and its Working Groups. To that end, an 'ad hoc Working Group on Priorities' was formed (the PWG). A list of members of the PWG can be found in Appendix 1.

Subsequent to AC4 the framework has been trialled, refined and substantially completed through e-mail correspondence, expert based analysis and a workshop of available members of the PWG in Hobart in October 2009. The Third Meeting of Parties (MOP3) of ACAP also signalled its support for the process and noted the benefits that will accrue to the Advisory Committee upon completion of this work.

## **Rationale**

The objective of the ACAP Agreement (the Agreement) is to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels. Under the Agreement, Parties are required to take measures, both individually and collectively, to achieve this objective, including those measures set out in Articles III to VI and Annex 2 of the Agreement.

Priority setting is both necessary and beneficial. It is necessary because the Agreement is constrained by limited funding, knowledge and resources. It is also beneficial because of the complexity and diversity of management actions required to achieve a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels.

At AC4, the Advisory Committee noted that there was considerable merit in developing a priority setting framework to help Parties to more effectively implement the Agreement. For instance, this could assist with:

- the development of an effective work plan that clearly identifies the most important and urgent tasks, and brings together different types of work, such as capacity building, research and engagement with RFMOs;
- improving the coordination of key aspects of the work of the Advisory Committee and its Working Groups, including by providing the opportunity for focussed reporting on work items to the Advisory Committee and to the Meeting of Parties; and
- highlighting important gaps in data and knowledge;

### **Approach taken to prioritising conservation actions**

The approach taken by the PWG uses a quantitative assessment methodology to determine priorities. Scores are assigned to variables relating to the following three key elements of the prioritisation framework:

- the vulnerability of a particular seabird population;
- the severity of threat faced by that population; and
- the likelihood of success of taking management action

The scores of these three elements are then weighted according to an assessment of their importance and combined to give a total score for a particular management action. In this way, conservation actions can be ranked by priority and compared with all other potential management actions. Management actions with similar scores are then grouped together and assigned a rank accordingly such as “Highest priority”. There are various potential applications for these results, as set out in the next section.

Currently, at-sea threats are prioritised separately to land-based threats. Work to prioritise land based threats, and to potentially harmonise the two sets of results, has not yet been completed and is proposed in the section below on next steps.

Full details of the methodology will be circulated following peer review of the weightings used in the framework.

### **Application of results**

The results of the prioritisation exercise can be used in the following manner:

#### ***Primary objective***

*“To prioritise actions that are most likely to effectively reduce impacts that adversely influence the population status of ACAP-listed albatross and petrel species most at risk of extinction”*

The results allow for the identification of specific conservation actions that are considered to make the greatest difference to the most severe threats to the most vulnerable seabird populations. This allows for prioritisation by ACAP and can also

be used by individual Parties, for instance, by looking at the species or threats that they may have a particular interest in.

An example of a conservation action is the introduction of mitigation measures in a particular fishery to address threats to a particular seabird population.

A full set of results will be circulated following peer review of the data.

### *Secondary objectives*

#### *1. Identifying priority research areas relating to effective conservation of albatrosses and petrels*

The framework focuses on prioritising management action that will effectively reduce risk to vulnerable populations. However, there is considerable benefit in also examining the risk associated with certain threats regardless of whether effective action can be taken at the present time. Such an assessment may help to prioritise research into mitigation measures, e.g. where there is a significant threat that cannot currently be effectively addressed, or may lead to activities to reduce overlap between fishing effort and seabird distribution.

An example of a “high risk” species-fishery interaction where it is difficult to introduce highly effective mitigation is the threat that pelagic longline fisheries pose to a number of albatross species.

A number of seabird-fishery interactions have been assessed based on very limited information. Many individual cells have been described as “unknown” and given a ‘moderate’ score. Some risks may be higher or lower than currently scored and it is recommended that research into seabird-fishery interactions (such as overlap of seabird distribution and fishing effort) be prioritised to enable “unknown” cells in the highest priority actions to be assessed as high, medium or low.

A set of the highest priority threats will be circulated following peer review of the data.

#### *2. Examination of all threats to a particular population or species*

Threats to a particular population of a species can be analysed to gain a qualitative understanding of the possible cumulative effects of the threats to a species. Currently it is not possible to quantitatively rank species by the level of cumulative threat to their constituent populations as further work is necessary to calibrate the numerical scoring. See next steps for further information on this process.

An example of the main identified fishery-related threats to a particular species is the Amsterdam Albatross, whose distribution overlaps with the French sub-Antarctic demersal longline fishery, the Australian trawl and demersal longline fisheries and the IOTC and CCSBT pelagic longline fisheries.

#### *3. Examination of all threats to ACAP species stemming from a particular fishery*

Threats to all ACAP seabird species stemming from a particular fishery can be analysed to gain a qualitative understanding of the possible cumulative threat to all ACAP species stemming from that fishery. Currently it is not possible to quantitatively rank fisheries by the level of cumulative threat as further work is necessary to calibrate the numerical scoring. See next steps for further information on this process.

An example of all the main threats posed by a particular fishery is the Angolan pelagic longline fishery which overlaps with the distribution to the Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross populations from both Gough Island and Tristan da Cunha and the Gough Island population of Tristan Albatross.

#### *4. Providing guidance on priorities for conservation actions that may require capacity building initiatives*

This prioritisation framework identifies the highest priority management actions for ACAP listed species. Many of these actions may be expensive or relate to fisheries that lack the resources to effectively implement appropriate mitigation and/or other management measures. Where appropriate, capacity building initiatives could be developed to address these highest priority management actions.

#### *Other applications of the results*

A number of other objectives can also be met, at least in part, through the prioritisation framework, including guiding Parties in the development and implementation of conservation strategies for particular species or groups of species of albatrosses and petrels. The framework may also assist in planning and delivery of the Action Plan, provision of information and advice and reporting and monitoring the progress of the Agreement.

#### **Next steps**

This paper represents the culmination of work undertaken between AC4 and AC5. Work remaining to complete the prioritisation framework includes:

#### *At-sea threats*

- Completing peer review of all data (underway)
- Completing the land-based components of the framework and potentially calibrating the results with the at-sea priorities
- Migrating the data onto an ACAP database and linking to the current ACAP databases
- Creating a system for updating the data and assessments as and when new information becomes available
- Developing a quantitative scoring system for identifying the cumulative threats posed to a species or by a fishery (see above)
- Delivering on the potential of the framework to address all of the secondary objectives described above

### *Land-based threats*

- Determine likelihood of success for conservation actions
- Test weighting criteria of factors determining priorities
- Compare and, if possible, calibrate against priorities to manage at-sea threats

### **Acknowledgements**

This framework has been developed through an ad-hoc Working Group on Priorities. As convenor, New Zealand is greatly indebted to all the members of this group for their time, expertise, tolerance and responsiveness to unreasonable requests and impossible deadlines. Particular thanks must be expressed to those Parties that made experts available to the project, to BirdLife International, the ACAP Secretariat and Advisory Committee and Working Group Chairs.

### **Appendix 1: Membership of ad-hoc Working Group on Priorities (PWG)**

The ad-hoc Working Group did not have a definitive membership. The below table provides a guide only and is taken from the most recent list of people that were receiving and contributing to e-mail discussions on the priorities framework. Contributions from people not on this list are acknowledged.

Spencer Clubb (Convenor)	New Zealand
Warren Papworth	Executive Secretary
Wieslawa Misiak	Science Officer
Marco Favero	Chair, Advisory Committee
Barry Baker	Chair, Seabird Bycatch Working Group
Rosemary Gales	Chair, Status and Trends Working Group
Richard Phillips	Chair, Breeding Sites Working Group
Mike Double	Chair, Taxonomy Working Group
Flavio Quintana	Argentina
John Croxall	BirdLife International
Ben Sullivan	BirdLife International
Henri Weimerskirch	France
Johanna Pierre	New Zealand
Robert Crawford	South Africa
Anton Wolfaardt	UK
Greg Balogh	USA
Kim Rivera	USA
Maura Naughton	USA