

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
INTERSESSIONAL MEETING OF THE ECOSYSTEM AND BYCATCH WORKING
GROUP

(by video conference)
13 January 2025

INTERSESSIONAL MEETING REPORT

The Intersessional Meeting of the Ecosystem and Bycatch Working Group (EBWG) was held to discuss progress towards the IATTC [Seabird Action Plan](#) (SAP) recommended by the EBWG during its 2nd Meeting in 2024 (see [EBWG-2 meeting report](#)). The meeting was held by videoconference on 13 January 2025 and cohosted by the EBWG cochairs and Dr. Jon Lopez from the IATTC staff. The workshop agenda and list of participants are provided in Annex 1 and 2, respectively.

1. Progress on seabird distribution and bycatch rates

IATTC staff Dr. Dan Crear presented on the steps to address points b and d of the SAP, which requested the staff to determine the overlap of seabird distributions and the longline fishery in the IATTC Convention Area and update seabird bycatch rates. Specifically, the presentation was on the steps that were taken over the last seven months to receive greater than 80 seabird tracking data sets that overlapped with the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) from seabird experts. The data sets were shared with IATTC staff in early January, after a long process of agreements between the staff and data holders. The staff also presented the resources compiled to date on seabird bycatch rates in the EPO, and the metadata that was being collected for this purpose.

Discussion

Participants of the workshop were pleased to hear about the progress on this task, including gaining access to over 80 seabird tracking data sets. Participants indicated similar work is being done in other regions of the world and indicated where potential resources may be available with bycatch rate information. There was also concern of not including small seabird species like shearwaters in the data analysis.

2. Progress on review of t-RMFO seabird CMMs and CPC mitigation measures

IATTC staff Dr. Melanie Hutchinson presented on the staff's progress and plan for addressing points a and c of the SAP, which requested the staff conduct a comparison between Resolution C-11-02 and the existing mitigation measures used in other t-RFMOs and an overview of mitigation measures in use by CPCs in the IATTC Convention Area, as required in paragraph 5 of C-11-02.

Discussion

In the review of potential mitigation measures, participants noted that they would like to see a review of the most effective combinations of potential measures – since most by themselves are not enough to make a meaningful difference. They also requested that the staff highlight the weaknesses of using individual measures alone e.g., using tori lines alone is susceptible to environmental conditions. The group noted that the updated Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) advice on Best Handling and Release Practices (BHRPs) is now available for the Commission's consideration too.

Other participants commented that the IATTC is the only RFMO that allows mitigation options that have no scientific evidence supporting efficacy for seabirds (e.g., blue dyed bait).

There were concerns raised about the effectiveness in the two areas of the IATTC (area where 2 measures are required and area where only 1 is encouraged) and about minimum standards of measure application (i.e., tori line lengths and weighted branchline weight requirements and safety) and how will these be reviewed for efficacy (i.e., are the measures actually reducing catch rates and can we use the observer data to resolve this).

There was significant discussion concerning the fleets across IATTC and how most seabird mitigation measures apply to high seas fisheries, where in the IATTC there is a lot of effort in smaller scale vessels that operate closer to shore. Many mitigation requirements may not work in the smaller scale vessel operations (i.e., tori lines with a length requirement over 100 m). Many participants agreed that recommendations needed to include and consider differences between vessel size and operations. ACAP advice now has tori line design guidance that applies to both the larger scale and vessels smaller than 30 m. So, the staff will include this consideration and ensure that any potential recommendation considers vessel size and operational differences for both the high seas and smaller scale inshore fleets.

One of the participants offered to provide additional data from dedicated experiments to support this effort as increased observer coverage may be required to obtain more accurate and representative results.

3. Development of seabird best handling and release practices

IATTC staff scientist Dr. Melanie Hutchinson presented the workplan to develop best handling and release practice (BHRP) guidelines for seabirds captured in IATTC fisheries and requested advice and support from the group in this effort. The workplan timeline is in good alignment with the timeline for the SAP to also include BHRP in a potential update of the C-11-02 measure this year. The workplan is currently in phase 3 for seabirds which includes the identification of subject matter experts, drafting and consultation on the BHRP guidelines with experts and interested parties. The plan is to have draft BHRP guidelines ready for the EBWG-3 meeting in May 2025.

Discussion

Several participants conveyed interest in participating. Most requested that any BHRP guidelines be in alignment with ACAP guidelines. ACAP noted that their guidelines are illustrated and freely available on their website.

Some participants brought up the very serious issue of the highly pathogenic bird flu being at epidemic proportions and that many crews are worried about handling infected seabirds. ACAP noted that there is handling advice for avian flu on their website too. These concerns were noted by the staff and plan to include these considerations in the development of BHRPs for the EBWG-3.

Annex 1. Agenda

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WORKING GROUP
La Jolla, California (USA)
13 January 2025
(by videoconference)**

PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda.
2. A brief description of the Seabird Action Plan.
3. Process made by the staff on seabird assessment.
 - a) Spatial distributions, overlap and seabird bycatch rates in the IATTC Convention Area.
 - b) Review of conservation and management measures and mitigation techniques used by the CPCs in the IATTC convention Area.
4. Others.
5. Closure of the Meeting.

Annex 2. Participants

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