

Title On Friday 16 November, after a 12 year long campaign by BirdLife Europe, the European Commission has finally launched an [EU Plan of Action](#) to reduce seabird bycatch, the incidental deaths of seabirds ensnared in fishing gears. BirdLife Europe has advocated for an action plan since 2001, when the European Commission first committed to proposing one. Since then, BirdLife Europe estimates that over 2 million seabirds have died in the fishing gears of vessels in EU waters alone, not counting the additional impact of EU-flagged vessels operating in the southern oceans where bycatch is held mainly responsible for 17 out of 22 albatross species being threatened with extinction. The EU Seabird Plan of Action aims at minimising and, where possible, eliminating the bycatch of seabirds in EU and external waters. It sets out to achieve this through a range of actions, notably calling on vessels to apply mitigation measures to prevent seabirds coming into contact with fishing gears. Other key areas cover research and development, and awareness-raising and training for fishermen. However, the plan is essentially voluntary and to have teeth it needs to be underpinned with legally binding measures under the reformed Common Fisheries Policy, in particular to require fishing boats to deploy mitigation measures and to collect data on seabird bycatch. It is a vital first step that the Seabird Action Plan has finally seen the light of day. In EU waters, most seabird bycatch arises from gillnets and longlines, but to a lesser extent also trawls and purse seine nets. At least 100,000 birds are killed every year in gillnets in the Baltic Sea and eastern North Sea. A Spanish longline fishery for hake off south-west Ireland is estimated to kill tens of thousands of seabirds annually, mostly great shearwaters. This slaughter flies in the face of the EU Birds Directive which is meant to protect European seabirds, including globally threatened species such as Balearic and Yelkouan Shearwaters, Steller's Eider, Velvet Scoter and Long-tailed Duck, all of which are caught and drowned in EU fishing gears. For the most threatened seabird species, BirdLife Europe looks to the plan to trigger emergency action to tackle their fatal attraction to fishing gear. Seabirds are among our most visible and iconic indicators of ocean health, and experience tells us that responsible fishermen would much rather catch fish than birds, if only they had the means to do so. The EU Seabird Plan of Action now gives Member States and the fishing industry a golden opportunity to do that and we hope they will seize it. BirdLife Europe applauds the EU for calling a halt to the needless deaths of seabirds and is ready to work together with fishing communities to put the plan into action. To read the EU Action Plan click [here](#). For more information contact [Johanna Karhu](#), EU Marine and Fisheries Policy officer, +32 2 238 5093