

Title Accidentally snagged on longline fishing hooks and then left to drown, the albatross populations in the South Atlantic are among the fastest-declining in the world. But a new resolution brokered and ratified at the ICCAT (The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas) meeting in Istanbul today (Saturday 19 November 2011) is giving hope to these beleaguered birds as Atlantic tuna and swordfish fishing nations will have to ensure vessels take preventative action to avoid accidentally catching these birds. One third of the world's albatrosses nest on the South Atlantic UK Overseas Territories: the Falkland Islands; South Georgia; and Tristan da Cunha. ICCAT manages all tuna and swordfish fisheries in the Atlantic outside territorial waters. These measures will significantly reduce the number of birds being killed. At the ICCAT meeting, the seabird measure was jointly proposed by the EU, Brazil, South Africa, Uruguay and the UK on behalf of its overseas territories. Dr Cleo Small, representing BirdLife International and the RSPB, attended the meeting. Speaking from Turkey on the meeting's outcome, she said: "This offers significant hope to the protection of these iconic UK birds, whose population declines are among the fastest of any seabird species worldwide. Today we have an agreement that all boats working in the open waters of the South Atlantic will have to adopt at least two measures to avoid catching seabirds. "This is a great day for albatrosses and other seabirds which die needlessly every minute of the day; accidental casualties in the tuna and swordfish fisheries." Natural Environment Minister Richard Benyon said: "This decision will lead to greater protection for albatrosses and other seabirds, and I am delighted that the UK and its Overseas Territories have played a part in this. This is a significant step in our ongoing efforts to conserve albatrosses in the South Atlantic, and I am particularly grateful to the RSPB who have worked hard over the years to help us achieve this." The measure requires all longline vessels fishing south of latitude 25 degrees S - roughly Brazil to Namibia - to use two out of three measures to reduce bycatch, from a choice of bird streamer (tori) lines, setting lines at night, or adding weight to their baited hooks. The UK's overseas territories host one third of the world's population of albatross and they have more than half of the population of the Southern Ocean. The South Atlantic has seven species of albatross which nest regularly, and six of these are considered to be facing extinction and overlap with the tuna and swordfish fishing fleets: Wandering Albatross; Sooty Albatross; Grey-headed Albatross; Tristan Albatross; Black-browed Albatross; and Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross.