Title

After long deliberations stretching across four days, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) have agreed to measures that could result in significant reductions in the deaths of albatrosses, which accidentally get snagged on long line fishing hooks and then drown.

The meeting, held in the Philippines, announced that all longline vessels in the South Pacific will now be required to use two seabird bycatch mitigation measures in areas overlapping with albatrosses. Vessels must choose from a choice of either bird streamers, also known as tori lines, which scare birds away from the hooks; adding weights to hooks to make them sink more quickly; or setting hooks at night when most birds are less active.

The move brings the WCPFC, which is the world?s largest tuna commission, in-line with the measures adopted in Atlantic in November 2011 and the Indian Ocean in April 2012. Scientists estimate that upwards of 300,000 seabirds are being killed every year by longline fisheries; it?s believed this is the primary reason behind 17 of the world?s 22 species of albatrosses being threatened with extinction. Home to globally important populations of 14 albatross species, including Antipodean, Chatham, Buller?s, Salvin?s, Shy and White-capped, the Pacific Ocean is home to large fleets of longliners fishing for tuna. Tuna longliners typically deploy several thousand hooks every day, attached by branchlines to a main line that can be more than 100km long. Seabirds, especially albatrosses, are vulnerable to becoming hooked when they take the bait, and are drowned as the line sinks. Dr Cleo Small, from the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and BirdLife International, said, ?This move is great news for albatrosses worldwide, including some UK albatross species such as the wandering albatross, which fly right around the world in the non-breeding period and can be victims of bycatch from the longliners that fish in the South Pacific. Without such measures, these beautiful birds could be lost forever.? Although an understanding of the scale and nature of this threat has been known for a long time, the development of measures to reduce bycatch has been slow. BirdLife International?s Global Seabird Programme has been particularly active in devising and testing technologies and fishing practices to reduce the problem and be part of the solution; the Albatross Task Force, founded by the organisations, works directly with fishermen and fishery managers in eight bycatch hotspot countries worldwide to reduce the number of seabirds being killed. The news from the WCPFC today follows the strong set of measures put in place last April when the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) agreed that fishing vessels must use two out of three measures to reduce bycatch when working in areas where albatrosses occur. Karen Baird, from Forest and Bird (BirdLife in New Zealand) was at the negotiations. ?Global fisheries have a duty and responsibility to fish sustainably and to minimise their impact on non-target species, such as seabirds and sea turtles. This measure is a very welcome move towards this goal: if implemented this could reduce the number of albatrosses killed by 80%. Now that these measures have been adopted in the Atlantic, Indian and South Pacific oceans, we hope that the North Pacific and East Pacific will follow suit.?