

BirdLife lends expertise to make high seas tuna fisheries sustainable

Title

The BirdLife Partnership will be contributing its unrivalled experience in reducing seabird bycatch to a five-year project to improve sustainability and biodiversity conservation in tuna fisheries operating on the high seas. The \$27 million project, *Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction*, is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and administered by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

The project aims to improve fisheries management and sustainability through the application of an ecosystem approach, to reduce illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and to mitigate adverse impacts of tuna fisheries on biodiversity.

This ambitious project brings the most important players in the world's tuna fisheries together with global leaders in the conservation of marine biodiversity. Along with BirdLife and other conservation and sustainability NGOs, participants include organisations representing fish consumers and the fishing industry, the governments of countries involved in fisheries, and the Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs).

“This project will, we hope, make a real difference to albatrosses and sea turtles on the high seas, by bringing together the fishing crews and conservationists to increase understanding of the threats posed by bycatch, and by putting in place solutions where it counts, on the back of the boats” said Dr Cleo Small, Head of BirdLife’s Global Seabird Programme.

“Without broad-based cooperation and synergy to optimise the use of scarce capacity and resources, there is little likelihood of achieving the global goals for sustainable fishing and biodiversity conservation”, said Dr Ross Wanless, Africa Coordinator for BirdLife’s Global Seabird Programme. “Experience from this project will be shared among RFMOs and their member states, the private sector and NGOs, to build confidence economically, socially and politically, so that the pilot work can be scaled up and rolled out elsewhere.”

BirdLife has been working with the five tuna RFMOs since 2004 to devise and implement ways of eliminating the incidental mortality of albatrosses and petrels in longline and trawl fisheries. All five RFMOs now have requirements for their longline vessels to use bycatch mitigation measures in areas overlapping with albatrosses.

BirdLife's role in the project is to ensure implementation of seabird and sea turtle conservation measures by longline fleets in the Southern Atlantic and Southern Indian Ocean, with the aim of reducing seabird and sea turtle mortality. BirdLife's roles will include the provision and development of bycatch mitigation equipment and techniques, and training the operators and crews of fishing fleets in the use of these.

BirdLife's Global Seabird Programme established the Albatross Task Force in 2005 to provide on-board training in these techniques to fishing fleets. The ATF now operates from fishing ports in South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Namibia, Uruguay, Ecuador and Peru, and most recently began work in South Korea.

More than 90% of tuna longline fishing effort in the high seas of the Southern Ocean comes from four nations – Japan, Taiwan, China and South Korea. Cape Town in South Africa is strategically located as a major port where vessels offload their catches from the high seas, and where an Albatross Task Force team is based. For this reason the project will be coordinated there, through BirdLife South Africa,.

Three new posts will be created at BirdLife South Africa, including a coordinator and two ATF-style instructors to work with distant water fleets. The focus will be on implementing the tuna RFMO seabird and turtle bycatch mitigation measures in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, with the possibility of rolling the work out to the Pacific Ocean in the later years of the project.