

The EU is one step closer to eliminating seabird bycatch

After years of dialogue, the European Commission has proposed that all relevant fishing vessels in the EU implement concrete measures to stop the accidental catching of seabirds in their fishing gear.

Brussels [11 March]: Today marks a historic day for European seabirds. BirdLife Europe^[1] welcomes the new legislation^[2] proposed by the European Commission that will make it mandatory for all fishing vessels in the EU that incidentally catch seabirds to put in place measures to stop them from doing so^[3].

It is estimated that at least 200,000 seabirds are accidentally caught annually in EU waters. This includes species on the verge of extinction such as the Balearic Shearwater. However, until today the EU had not enacted any legally binding legislation for fishers to solve this problem. This proposed legislation is a game changer.

In 2012, the European Commission published the Seabird Plan of Action^[4] in an effort to codify the actions needed from different national, regional and EU institutions to solve the issue of seabird bycatch across the EU. The new legislation proposed today was one of the actions at the EU level foreseen in the plan.

Ariel Brunner, Senior Head of Policy at BirdLife Europe, stated: *“The avoidable massacre of majestic seabirds as bycatch is a long-running scandal. The problem has been virtually solved in many fisheries around the world. **Today’s proposal can make the use of mitigation measures the norm in EU waters as well.**”*

We particularly welcome measures being proposed for longline fisheries^[5]. BirdLife has already demonstrated globally^[6] that these solutions—including having scaring devices on boats, setting fishing lines at night, and adding weights to hooks to have them drop faster—help minimise seabird bycatch. We also believe these technical measures will encourage Member States to propose fisheries management measures for Natura 2000 sites.

Together with the recently proposed revision of the legislation that sets the framework for what data needs to be collected from fishers^[7], the momentum to achieve concrete results in reducing seabird bycatch across the EU is building.

The efforts do not end here. The legislation will still need to be negotiated between the Council (i.e. Member States) and the European Parliament this year before it becomes enforceable law. We hope both institutions remember what is needed to implement the ambitions of the Common Fisheries Policy and ensure this new legislation supports a good management of EU fisheries. **ENDS**

For further information, please contact:

Bruna Campos, EU Marine and Fisheries Policy Officer, BirdLife Europe:
Bruna.campos@birdlife.org
+32 (0) 478 88 6420

Notes:

[1] BirdLife Europe is a Partnership of nature conservation organisations in 47 countries, including all EU Member States, and a leader in bird conservation. Through its unique local to global approach BirdLife Europe delivers high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.

[2] More details on the new proposed legislation is available here: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2016:134:FIN>

[3] Seabirds forage in areas of the ocean that are rich in fish, which are also targeted by commercial fishing vessels. This overlap can cause seabirds to be accidentally caught on hooks or entangled in nets meant for the fish.

[4] The Seabird Plan of Action can be found here: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52012DC0665>

[5] Longline fishing is a commercial technique that uses a long fishing line with baited hooks attached at intervals to catch fish.

[6] The Albatross Task Force (ATF) is an international team of seabird bycatch mitigation experts established in 2006 by the BirdLife Partnership. Its main objective is to reduce the bycatch of albatross and petrels in targeted fisheries, and ultimately to improve the conservation status of threatened seabirds. The principal duties of the ATF include identifying fisheries that pose the greatest risk to seabirds and developing, demonstrating and implementing best practice measures to reduce seabird bycatch to negligible levels. The ATF has had consistent results in clear demonstrations that seabird bycatch can be reduced by >90% once the right combination of mitigation measures are deployed. More details here: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/joinandhelp/donations/campaigns/albatross/taskforce/>

[7] The European Commission's proposal on Data Collection Regulation is available to view here: http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/fishing_rules/data_collection/index_en.htm