

BirdLife Position

On the Western Mediterranean Demersal Fisheries Multiannual Plan (COM(2018) 115)

June 2018

Seabirds forage in highly productive areas of the ocean, which are also targeted by commercial fishing vessels. This overlap can cause them to be accidentally caught on hooks, or entangled in nets. It is estimated that every year across Europe more than 200,000 seabirds die as bycatch in fishing gears.¹ The critically endangered Balearic Shearwater, the vulnerable Yelkouan Shearwater and Scopoli's shearwater, all of them endemic breeders to the Mediterranean Sea basin, are known to be regularly caught in pelagic and demersal longline fisheries in the Western Mediterranean with thousands of them likely dying every year.^{2,3,4} These seabirds are protected under the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) and incidental catches could lead them to extinction⁵. Member States are infringing on the Birds Directive by having poor management of the fisheries to stop the bycatch of these species.⁶ Therefore the Common Fisheries Policy ((EU)1380/2013) foresees that fishing management rules are implemented and enforced to minimize the impact of fishing to the marine environment.

In 2012 the European Commission adopted a Plan of Action for reducing incidental catches of seabirds in fishing gears (COM/2012/0665).⁷ The plan's objective is to minimize, and where possible, eliminate incidental catches of seabirds by implementing technical measures along with other actions. In particular, the plan foresaw specific actions for the Mediterranean, specifically for managing seabird bycatch from longline fishing.

In 2018, the European commission proposed a multiannual plan to manage demersal fisheries in Western Mediterranean (COM(2018) 115). This plan, however, failed to ensure that technical measures will tackle the incidentally catching of seabirds. For example, mitigation solutions have been developed for some specific fishing gears⁸ and, having been scientifically tested in fisheries around the world, have been found to prevent or dramatically reduce the incidental catches of seabirds.⁹ Nevertheless, these solutions were missing from the plan.

Recommendations for the plan:

- The plan should have as an objective, to manage fisheries in order to protect seabirds as legally required under the Birds Directive and in full agreement with article 2.3 of the CFP.
- Utilising data collected as per the Data Collection Regulation ((EU) 2017/1004), the plan should lay down provisions for monitoring and reporting bycatch occurrence in different gears, including identifying the overlap of susceptible seabird species with fishing gears and fishing effort.
- The plan should lay down provisions for scientific research to identify mitigation solutions and trial them to minimise seabird bycatch.
- The plan should establish that all demersal fisheries within the geographical scope of the plan implement the most appropriate mitigation measures, alone or in combination depending on the particularities of

¹Zydelis, R., Small, C., French, G., 2013. The incidental catch of seabirds in gillnet fisheries: A global review. *Biological Conservation*, 162, 76–88.

²Barcelona, S., et al. 2010. Seabird bycatch in Spanish Mediterranean large pelagic longline fisheries, 2000–2008. *Aquat. Living Resour.* 23, 363–371.

³FAO: [The state of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries \(2016\)](#)

⁴Cortés, V., Arcos, J.M. and González-Solís, J., 2017. Seabirds and demersal longliners in the northwestern Mediterranean: factors driving their interactions and bycatch rates. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, 565, pp.1–16.

⁵Genovart, M., Arcos, J.M., Álvarez, D., McMinn, M., Meier, R., Wynn, R., Guilford, T. & Oro, D. 2016. Demography of the critically endangered Balearic shearwater: the impact of fisheries and time to extinction. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 53: 1158–1168.

⁶Case 340/10 Commission vs Cyprus

⁷[Communication from the Commission: Action Plan for reducing incidental catches of seabirds in fishing gears](#)

⁸[Seabird bycatch mitigation factsheets- BirdLife International & ACAP.](#)

⁹Tarzia, M. (compiler), Arcos, P., Cama, A., Cortés, V., Crawford, R., Morkūnas, J., Opiel, S., Raudonikas, L., Tobella, C., Yates, O., 2017. Seabird Task Force: 2014–2017. [Technical report.](#)

each métier. For longliners, which are the main potential threat, the following measures should be considered in the first instance: tori lines, changes to line weights, hook shielding, and night-setting. The combinations should be determined on the basis of gear configurations and the susceptible species likely to be caught. Specification should comply with the minimum standards as set out in international agreed guidelines.

- In a given fishery, should no other mitigation solutions be known to minimise seabird bycatch, and where there is compelling conservation need, spatial and temporal measures should be applied until alternative mitigation solutions can be implemented.

Recommended technical measures to be included in the plan (based on spatial, temporal and ecological criteria depending on seabirds):

Fishing Gear	Measures	Descriptions
All gears	Spatial measures: No-fishing Zone/ real time closures	No fishing zones remove the risk of seabirds interacting with fishing gears within the specific area, they are effective where high concentration of sensitive species of seabirds regularly occur. Real-time scientific observations of seabird distribution enables setting precise temporal and real time closures for sites and periods with high concentrations of seabirds. ¹⁰¹¹ This may be particularly appropriate in the vicinity of seabird colonies with low foraging ranges, such as shags.
Longline and trawl	Bird-scaring devices (e.g. streamer line, also known as tori line)	Streamers flap with the wind and scare birds away from the vessels. A bycatch reduction of 95% have been recorded by applying this technical solution. ¹²¹³
Longline (demersal)	Line weighting/integrated weight longlines	Changes in the position and mass of line weights increases the sink rate of the hook, giving seabirds less time and opportunity to dive for the baited hook.
Longline and trawl	Night-setting with minimum deck lighting	Some seabirds are predominantly active during the day and less active at night. Setting fishing gear at night minimizes the chances of bycatch.
Longline (pelagic)	Hook shielding	Hook shielding devices protect the barb of the hook until it sinks to a predetermined depth, which reduces the risk of seabird bycatch. Bycatch reductions of 95% have been recorded on vessels applying this technical solution. ¹⁴
Gillnets	Net Lights ¹⁵ and other visual cues ¹⁶	Further tests should be carried out with net lights and other visual cues acting to alert diving seabirds to the presence of the fishing nets.

Contact: Bruna Campos, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, bruna.campos@birdlife.org, Tel: +32 238 50 9

¹⁰[Croxall, J.P., 2008](#). The role of science and advocacy in the conservation of Southern Ocean albatrosses at sea. Bird Conservation International, 18(S1), pp.S13-S29.

¹¹[Bull, L.S., 2007](#). Reducing seabird bycatch in longline, trawl and gillnet fisheries. Fish and Fisheries, 8(1), pp.31-56.

¹²[ACAP and BirdLife International: Bycatch Mitigation Fact-sheet 7b \(September 2014\)](#)

¹³[Maree, B., et al. 2014](#). Significant reductions in mortality of threatened seabirds in a South African trawl fishery. Animal Conservation, 17(6), pp.520-529.

¹⁴[ACAP: Seventh Meeting of the Seabird Bycatch Working Group \(May 2016\)](#)

¹⁵[ACAP: Sixth Meeting of the Seabird Bycatch Working Group \(September 2014\)](#)

¹⁶[Martin, G.R., Crawford, R., 2015](#). Reducing bycatch in gillnets: A sensory ecology perspective. Global Ecology and Conservation 3, 28–50.