

# Time to halt seabird bycatch in the EU

## Every year at least 200,000 seabirds die as bycatch in the gears of EU fishing vessels

Half of these deaths occur in the Baltic and Eastern North Sea. Incidental seabird death in fisheries is mainly brought about by longline and static net fishing techniques and to a lesser extent also by trawl and purse seine fishing. Seabird bycatch poses a serious threat to many seabird populations, of which at least 49 are classified as being of conservation concern. Moreover, it also has an adverse effect on fishing productivity, profitability and employment.

## The magnitude of seabird bycatch in the EU is in blatant contrast with EU legislation and policy objectives

The seabirds affected are protected under both the Birds Directive<sup>1</sup> and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive<sup>2</sup>. Minimising the impact of fishing activities on marine ecosystems is also clearly stated as one of the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)<sup>3</sup> and the EU Biodiversity Strategy<sup>4</sup>.

## After 12 years of advocacy work by BirdLife Europe the European Commission finally launched an Action Plan for reducing incidental catches of seabirds in fishing

Launched in November 2012, it aims “to minimise and, where possible, eliminate the incidental catches of seabirds, with priority action focussing on individuals belonging to at least 49 threatened seabird populations by EU vessels operating in EU and non-EU waters, as well as by non-EU vessels operating in EU waters.

## Proven cost-effective solutions exist

For most of these bycatch problems, more so for longlines and trawls than for static gear, **proven cost-effective technical solutions exist** to remove or mitigate the risk to seabirds.

These solutions include avoidance of fishing in certain areas and at certain times; the use of weighted lines; bird-scaring and reducing the attractiveness of the baited hooks. Such **mitigation measures** are already in routine use by other fishing nations around the world, and have proven to reduce seabird deaths dramatically. In longline fisheries, techniques to reduce bait-snatching by seabirds can even increase fish catch.



1. Directive 2009/147/EC: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:020:0007:0025:EN:PDF>

2. Directive 2008/56/EC: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:164:0019:0040:EN:PDF>

3. COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 2371/2002: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2002:358:0059:0080:EN:PDF>

4. EU Biodiversity Strategy: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/2020.htm> and <http://www.birdlife.org/eubiodiversityreport2012/>

5. COM(2012) 665: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0665:FIN:EN:PDF>



**Longlines** - In longline fishing the vessel deploys a line, which is several kilometres long from which short branchlines are attached at intervals, each ending in a baited hook. Depending on the target species the longline and hooks either sit on the bottom (demersal longline) or are suspended by buoys near the sea surface (pelagic longline).

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) reports that at least 20 seabird species are ensnared on longline hooks in EU waters. Pelagic longlines dominate in the Mediterranean and demersal longlines in the North Eastern Atlantic, although ICES reports seabird bycatch in almost all EU longline fisheries.

**Static nets** - These are nets for which the catch operation does not require an active movement of the nets. Most static nets are gillnets. A recent review of seabird bycatch in the Baltic and Eastern North Sea shows that gillnets cause the bycatch of between 100,000 - 200,000 birds annually.



## Recommendations for the implementation of an effective Action Plan halting seabird bycatch

The EU Seabird Action Plan entails a wide range of elements including recommended actions, strengthening existing provisions and incorporation of certain elements into future regulations. The Plan is a combination of binding and non-binding measures, some of which will be implemented at EU level while others need voluntary action by Member States or endorsement by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) in fisheries outside EU waters.

### Specific actions of the EU Seabird Action Plan include:

- ▶ More rapid implementation of fisheries management measures to protect seabirds within Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Birds Directive
- ▶ Undertaking more extensive monitoring of fisheries where information on seabird bycatch is lacking or uncertain
- ▶ Implementing proven mitigation measures in longline fisheries in EU and non-EU waters where bycatch is the highest
- ▶ Instigating research into the development of practical and efficient mitigation measures, particularly in static net fisheries
- ▶ In the long-term, incorporating the mitigation and monitoring elements into the new EU frameworks for technical measures and data collection, that are being developed in the context of the CFP reform, and to provide necessary funding to support these activities under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

## Stop seabirds from dying as bycatch in European fisheries

Birdlife Europe calls on the European institutions, Member States, fishermen, NGOs and other stakeholders to commit to implementing the EU Seabird Action Plan in order to halt the needless loss of seabirds in EU fisheries.

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