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BirdLife Europe's answer to the public consultation on the EU-Mauritania fisheries agreement' 2015-2019 protocol

West African waters support at least **39 seabird species**, half of which are migratory. West Africa is a prominent area on the East Atlantic Flyway, for birds moving between Africa and Eurasia. Many migrant European species such as the Scopoli's shearwater and the Northern gannet are dependent on the region either for wintering grounds or as a stopover destination (D. Grémillet et al., 2015) and are protected under the Birds Directive.

Six Marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) have been identified in Mauritania where European species such as the Cory's Shearwater number up to more 38 000 individuals.

Fishing is a top threat in these Mauritanian IBAs and to seabirds worldwide, leading some to extinction. Bottom trawlers, pelagic trawlers and surface longliners are fisheries with high amounts of seabird and turtle bycatch in Europe, and are also the most present in West African waters. Studies suggest that there is a high seabirds and turtles mortality from fishing activities off West African Waters with also a proved important megafauna bycatch rate (Zeeberg et al., 2006).

As part of the Common Fisheries Policy, the EU is committed to tackle its fishing impact on the marine environment, including outside of the EU. It is also legally obliged to protect species under the Birds and Habitats Directives outside its own waters, especially where these are being impacted by EU activities. SFPAs are key for the EU to control its Distant Water Fleet (DWF) and gather data on its impact on the wider marine environment. However, past SFPAs have failed to ensure this.

BirdLife Europe therefore considers that the following recommendations should be reflected in a future fisheries agreement between the EU and Mauritania:

- The EU has adopted in 2012 a **European Action Plan for reducing incidental catches of seabirds in fishing gears**. It acknowledges that "in external waters longlines and trawls are responsible for a high number of incidental catches of seabirds leading to widespread concern on the long-term ecological effects on populations" and commits the European Commission to "ensure that observers routinely deployed on vessels operating in external waters accurately record seabird bycatch."
- **Technical mitigation measures** ([Bull, L.S., 2007](#) ; Seabird bycatch mitigation factsheets <http://www.birdlife.org/bycatch>) should be adopted under SFPAs as a condition for EU fishers to obtain a fishing authorisation from the contracting coastal State hosting EU vessels. The measures should be adopted in line with the Birds and Habitats Directives and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive – in particular for ensuring that protected species achieve favourable reference values;
- The **EU Data Collection Framework** obliges, since 2017, European vessels to collect data on the impact of their activity on the marine environment, including seabirds and sea turtles



bycatch. Systematic data collection on seabirds and turtles bycatch should therefore take place on EU vessels in West Africa (Anderson et al., 2011) and form the basis of the EU decision making. The EU should financially support Mauritania with establishing an observer programme including support in training of observers and support in creating a common data centre accessible to both Mauritania and EU countries;

- An **efficient control system** is needed to properly control the DWF through better coordination, increased financial and technical support and capacity building provided by the EU. This includes providing training to local Mauritanian inspectors and ensure that all EU vessels can be monitored by Mauritanian authorities through effective Vessels Monitoring Systems and Remote Electronic Systems.
- **European tax payers'** money used to finance the access of these EU vessels to Mauritanian EEZ should be spent transparently and sustainably by explicitly supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals 2, 5, 10, 12, 14 and 17.

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