



## Albatross Task Force

### Introduction

Many programmes around the world place observers on vessels to monitor and record seabird bycatch. However, there is a real shortage of qualified at-sea practitioners to help and train fishers in the selection and use of appropriate mitigation measures. Currently, mitigation research is being conducted by a handful of individuals working independently, and no coordinated team of specifically tasked practitioners exists.

The Albatross Task Force has established a much-needed team of mitigation instructors to work on 'grass roots' projects with fishers on-shore and at-sea. The Instructors conduct workshops and fishing trips to demonstrate to fisheries managers and fishers the need for, effectiveness of, and ease of adopting a range of 'best practice' mitigation measures that - once deployed - rapidly reduce seabird mortality levels. Where practicable, instructors also conduct at-sea trials to help in the research and development of new technology and to refine the application of existing measures.

### Project Structure

Fisheries targeted by the task force fall into two broad categories based on their management structures, vessel characteristics, industry incentives, level of observer coverage and bycatch data availability. This division helps to determine fishery-based project objectives. It recognises that both between and within country the objectives of the task force will be largely determined by the nature of the fishery being targeted. Thus, the task force will work with two broad types of fishery

**Type I** - typically occur in countries with large diverse fleets (including artisanal fisheries)

- considerable known or potential overlap between seabirds and fishing effort
- limited awareness of seabird conservation issues
- initial bycatch estimates lacking [or limited/anecdotal bycatch data]

- limited industry incentives and structures

**Type II** – typically in countries characterised by fleets of large vessels (factory fleets)

- Bycatch estimates available [observer programmes in place]
- In-country capacity to collect bycatch data and promulgate mitigation measure
- Industry incentives in place [mitigation measures]

Striking the correct balance between on-shore and at-sea training is a fundamental key to the success of the task force. In some cases [typically Type I fisheries], considerable time and effort needs to be spent creating links at various levels of industry: managers, vessel managers, captains and crew. Depending on the nature of the fishery and industry incentive structures in-place the approach varies on several levels: between country, within country, and between fishery. [Within each fishery it is important to recognise that each vessel and crew are unique and where possible each combination should be profiled and the appropriate mitigation measures and strategy developed].

### **Project Objectives**

The framework of the task force comprises five general principles, within a clearly defined conservation goal as the primary objective:

*To reduce bycatch of albatross and petrels in targeted fisheries, and ultimately to improve the conservation status of threatened seabirds.*

The following secondary objectives are interrelated and synergies between them will be critical to meeting the primary conservation objective of the project.

*Awareness - increased awareness in the fishing industry and community of seabird/fisheries conservation issues*

*Branding - profile for collaborators, government and funding bodies*

*Capacity - provide medium to long-term support for collaborators and establish/strengthen relationships between BirdLife and other organisations*

*Funding – identify and secure resources for the long-term life of the project*

*Strategic [political]-secure government support, promote and provide capacity for policy initiatives such as NPOA-S.*

## Placement of Task Force Effort

The initial concept of the task force was to target countries with the following characteristics: (1) limited capacity for such programmes; (2) some degree of BirdLife or collaborator advocacy or outreach; (3) Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) supporting significant numbers of threatened albatross species (relevant to FAO National Plans of Action and the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels) and longline, trawl [and other] fisheries. In October 2005, a workshop held in Hobart, Tasmania to develop a strategic plan for the development of the ATF. At the meeting we discussed several options to focus effort, including placing instructors in countries to target bycatch of seabirds of known [or presumed] provenance. Thus placing effort in Argentina, Brazil, southern Africa and Uruguay would enable the task force to focus on reducing seabird bycatch of birds from South Georgia. The workshop participants recognised the value in working towards bycatch reduction that in the long-term could be measurable in population changes at breeding colonies. But it was also considered it important to focus effort where there was the most immediate need and adequate support structures [in industry and with in-country collaborators] to give tangible results. One of the key outputs of the workshop was a matrix to identify priority countries based on a range of criteria. These included:

- fisheries capacity [level of receptiveness to engage on the issue],
- collaborator capacity [capacity to support and assist task force members and deliver outcomes]
- size and nature of the domestic and distant water fleet operating in EEZ
- government support [level of support within upper level of government]
- political timing [current opportunities for leverage]
- availability of baseline bycatch data

Based on these criteria South Africa, Brazil and Chile were identified as the first two countries for the ATF to target.

## Phase I

### South Africa

The first ATF instructors were employed by Birdlife South Africa in March 2006. These two instructors work in both demersal longline fleet, which targets predominantly Kingklip (*Genypterus capensis*), and pelagic longline fisheries, which targets albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*), southern bluefin (*T. maccoyii*) and bigeye (*T. obesus*) tunas. This was followed in September 2006 by a third instructor who works specifically in the South African hake trawl fishery, which targets *Merluccius paradoxus* and *M. capensis*, was recently shown to killed an estimated 18,000 seabirds in 2005/06, 70% of which were albatross.

## Brazil

In September 2006, in collaboration with Projeto Albatroz, two ATF instructors were deployed in Brazil. This team is working with pelagic longline fleets operating from Santos in the south and Itijai on the central coast. Vessels in these fleets with lighter 'surface' longline gear typically target a combination of swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*), yellow tuna (*Thunnus albacares*) and sharks, while other vessels target Atlantic Albacore and bigeye tuna in deeper waters.

## Chile

In March 2007, we employed three instructors in Chile, two (one full-time, one half-time) working in the swordfish fishery that operates around Juan Fernández Archipelago and is based in Coquimbo. Given the significant overlap with the foraging range of Black-browed albatross (*Thalassarche melanophris*) from Chile and Salvin's (*T. salvini*) and Buller's (*T. bulleri*) albatrosses from New Zealand, amongst a range of other species, it is vital that the level of seabird bycatch in this fishery is quantified and as appropriate mitigation measures are introduced, in line with the draft NPOA-Seabirds for Chile.

In addition, one half-time post is based with Prof. Carlos Moreno in Valdivia, to work with the demersal fleet targeting Patagonian Toothfish (*Disosstichus eleageoides*) and focus on the production of education materials for the key Chilean fleets. The Chile team are managed by Prof. Moreno and Dr. Rodrigo Hucke-Gaete (Centro Ballena Azul).

## **Next Steps (Phase II)**

### Uruguay

In many ways, Uruguay is one of the countries in most urgent need of the Albatross Task Force. The shelf break region of Uruguay provides rich foraging grounds for a range of albatross and petrel species and some of the highest recorded bycatch rates have come from this area. The most recent estimates indicate that the Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) population of Bird Island (Isla del Sur) is declining at around 8% per year, this rapidly increasing rate of decline is occurring in a breeding population that has already halved in size since the early 1970s. Mortality figures of Wandering albatross from Uruguay suggest that adopting mitigation measures in domestic Uruguayan pelagic longline fisheries is critical to halting the decline of Wandering albatross and several other threatened species (e.g. Tristan albatross, Black-browed albatross, and Spectacled petrel).

### Argentina

Fabian Rabuffetti (Aves Argentinas) is working closely with key collaborators in Argentina, including Marco Favero and Gabriella Blanco (INIDEP) to finalise a proposal to employ an instructor to work in the large and diverse factory trawler fleet that operates off the coast of Argentina. We hope to have an instructor in place by the end of

August 2007. Once this person has been in place for 6-months and we feel we have the support of key industry and government personnel, including appropriate levels of vessel access we will consider employing additional instructors to work in this fishery, and potentially longline fisheries in Argentina.

### Namibia

The rich waters of the Benguela Current that lie off the coast of Namibia are critically important for the conservation of range of albatross and petrels from Atlantic breeding populations and a range of species that breed on Marion and Prince Edward Islands in the southern Indian Ocean. Through the Global Environment Facility funded Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem project, BirdLife South Africa have worked extensively in Namibia in recent years and have established good links with both the Namibian Fisheries Research Department and the local fishing industry. We are currently negotiating to palace two task force instructors in Namibia to work in both longline and trawl fisheries in the region.

### **Project Management and funding**

The strategic development of the ATF is managed by the BirdLife Global Seabird Programme (GSP) Coordinator in consultation with the GSP South American Coordinator (based at Aves Argentinas, Buenos Aires) the Steering Group of the GSP, BirdLife collaborators from around the world and senior staff at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Birdlife Secretariat. However, the day-to-day management of ATF chapters is the responsibility of in-country project leaders, which enables the team to maximise local knowledge and contacts to deliver conservation action for seabird conservation. We are also in the process of recruiting an ATF Coordinator to be based in South America (Chile), which at the core of the ATF work. The ATF Coordinator will be responsible for developing a communication strategy for the project, overseeing the development of an integrated approach across ATF partners and facilitating and coordinating the development of comparable data collection protocols across the project, as feasible.

The project is funded by a combination of RSPB membership and project specific donations, secured from individuals and potentially donor organisations.

### **Relationships between collaborators**

The success of the programme will depend on strengthening relationships and providing support for BirdLife partners, and working closely with other organisations. The nature of such arrangements may vary between MoUs and more informal, morally binding agreements. However, to ensure that all parties are clear on expectations associated with the project, in every case there will be clear targets and timelines associated with all arrangements.

## **Long-term project legacy**

It is critical that we are able to objectively assess the success of the project in reaching its primary conservation objective. To do so, we are in the process of developing a range of performance indicators. The deliverables for each country [and fishery] will be a different combination of awareness, capacity building, observer-based bycatch data and the uptake of mitigation measures. The management structure of the project has been developed to enable the in-country collaborators to work with project management to develop indicators that reflect aims for the fisheries in a pre-determined time period [e.g. 18 months], in terms of seabird bycatch.

Some successes are obviously more tangible than others and the deliverables from each country will be largely determined by the incentives already in place. For example, in some cases the initial projective objective will be to raise awareness of the conservation issues and the need for mitigation [Type I fisheries], and in other fisheries [Type II] indicators such as the level of adoption of mitigation measures will serve as a more direct measure of success.

Some indicative indicators discussed at the workshop included;

- Number of on-shore workshops and number of attendees
- Level of instructor coverage at-sea
- Development and dissemination of training materials
- Dissemination of mitigation measures
- Establishment of a centralised database for collation and analysis of the task force's success in reducing bycatch
- Voluntary uptake of mitigation measures
- Industry incentive structures in place [reflected in fisheries regulations]

To be successful ATF must leave a conservation legacy beyond the life of the project. Ideally, this should include securing funding for at least a proportion of the project in selected countries without injection of external [BirdLife] funds. Although it is difficult to ascertain the direct cause of seabird population recoveries, in the long-term, reductions in seabird mortality achieved by the task force should be reflected in decreased population declines and/or population recovery.

## **Selection and training of instructors**

The 2005 workshop participants recognised that the success of the project relied heavily on the recruitment of the correct people. The key character attributes required of the instructors include:

- Local people with language skills and respect of industry
- Confident, knowledgeable and sympathetic in dealings with fishermen
- Understanding of fisheries practices, culture, and the need for mitigation measures
- Hardworking and able to gain respect

It was recognised that once recruited the instructors would need some level of training from their in-country host, and that to make the most efficient use of resources, once sufficient instructors were employed a training workshop(s) for all instructors would be conducted by international mitigation experts.

The workshop participants strongly supported the notion of identifying industry 'leaders' who had the skills and knowledge to champion mitigation measures across fleets, and in so doing so, give them a level of credibility and acceptance that is difficult for outsiders to achieve. The task force maximises opportunities to utilise the skills of existing industry leaders and encourages and support the development of others.