BirdLife International Statement to the 25th Special Meeting of the ICCAT Commission

Seabird bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries is a solvable issue. ICCAT Member States could significantly reduce seabird bycatch by implementing the mitigation measures required by ICCAT in Recommendations 07-07 and 11-09.

Instead, approximately 40% of seabird deaths in the southern hemisphere are estimated to occur in the ICCAT Convention Area covered by these Recommendations. This is causing a conservation crisis for albatrosses and petrels.

To begin to address seabird bycatch in longline fisheries, BirdLife International ask ICCAT to:

1. **Adopt scientifically proven seabird bycatch mitigation measures**

Scientific analysis (SCRS_2024_079) and internationally agreed advice indicate ICCAT does not currently mandate the most effective mitigation measures for reducing seabird bycatch.

Amending branch-line weighting specifications, and including hook-shielding devices as a standalone, optional seabird bycatch mitigation measure, would address this.

We thank Members who responded to the UK request for information on branch-line weighting safety (***PWG-414***) and highlight the UK analysis and summary paper in response (***PWG-419***).

2. **Urgently increase observer coverage**

Increased observer coverage (human and/or electronic) is known to increase compliance and is essential to obtain data that can robustly estimate bycatch.

SCRS advice states 5% observer coverage (Recommendation 16-14) is inappropriate to estimate total bycatch and bycatch of common species. Instead, SCRS recommends a minimum of 20% observer coverage, with 50% required to estimate bycatch of rare species, such as seabirds.

In alignment with SCRS, we request that ICCAT urgently increases the minimum observer coverage level to 20% and adopts a timebound plan to achieve 100% observer coverage on longline vessels.

ICCAT purse seine and some longline fleets already demonstrate higher observer coverage is possible. Electronic monitoring (EM) and adopted minimum standards make increases even more feasible.

3. **Improve seabird bycatch data reporting**

Current ICCAT data collection and reporting requirements do not enable ICCAT to calculate spatially explicit seabird bycatch rates, assess the efficacy of measures required under Recommendations 07-07 and 11-09, or track trends in compliance with mandated seabird bycatch mitigation measures.

To solve this issue, we request ICCAT amends the data collection and reporting requirements for seabird bycatch and mitigation measure use in Recommendations 07-07 and 11-09.

WCPFC and CCSBT show this is possible and provide a model for ICCAT to follow. Members of ICCAT and WCPFC and/or CCSBT already report in this format, which indicates capacity to do so within ICCAT.

BirdLife International are grateful to Members who are positively engaging on seabird bycatch and thank the EU, Secretariat, Chair and Members for hosting and convening this meeting.