BirdLife International Statement to the Permanent Working Group for the improvement of ICCAT statistics and conservation measures

November 2026

BirdLife International acknowledge the crew safety concerns raised by ICCAT Members regarding the use of weighted branch lines and hook shielding devices, and the risk of flybacks.

BirdLife International thank the UK for initiating discussion on this issue (IMM_06/i2026 and ***PWG_419***) and we thank the EU and Japan for responding with information (***PWG_414***).

Recommendation 11-09 on reducing incidental catch of seabirds was adopted 15 years ago and includes branch line weighting as one of three potential options that can be used to reduce seabird bycatch. ICCAT Members have reported use of branch line weighting for many years.

BirdLife International highlight established advice on Improving Safety when Hauling Branch lines during Pelagic Longline Fishing Operations provided by the multi-lateral Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP).

The advice outlines practical measures to control the risk of flyback and reduce risk to crew by:

i) Modifying hauling practices (to avoid the risk)

ii) Designing weighted branch lines to minimise flybacks (to reduce the risk)

iii) Use of crew PPE (to mitigate the risk)

To enable a solution-focused discussion, and in line with the UK request in IMM_06/i2026, BirdLife International encourage ICCAT Members to share operational practices implemented in their fleets to control the risk of flyback and ensure crew safety.