IOTC-2006-WPBy-08

Japan's National Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries

February 2001
(Partly revised in March 2005)

Fisheries Agency of Japan
Government of Japan

Japan's National Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (NPOA-Seabirds)

1. Introduction - Basic Principles and Objectives

(1) Japan, as a responsible fishing nation, supports the recognition by the international community that "fisheries are an important industry having the function to ensure social and economic welfare of people around the world" (Kyoto Declaration on Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security and its Action Plan). Japan pays due respect to the international agreements that "states commit themselves to the conservation and sustainable use of marine living resources" (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and Chapter 17 of Agenda 21). Japan also re-affirms the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing which underscores the contribution of fisheries to food security.

(2) In parallel, Japan shares concerns regarding incidental catches of seabirds in longline fisheries by various nations. With a view to minimizing incidental catches of seabirds, Japan is committed to objectively and scientifically analyzing the impact of its longline fisheries on populations of seabirds. Japan embraces a basic policy of encouraging fishers to develop creative solutions to this issue, such as the use of streamer devices (the tori-pole streamer) developed by Japanese longline fishers.

(3) In addition, Japan has set a target which "aims to achieve full implementation of mitigation measures to reduce incidental catches of seabirds pursuant to the NPOA-Seabirds (See 9.(1) below) by 2015", and will strive to ensure progressive implementation of the NPOA-Seabirds to reduce such incidental catches.

(4) Furthermore, Japan is committed to promoting research and development, and to sponsoring guidance, outreach and educational activities for Japanese longline fishers on specific measures to be taken with a view to achieving the goal of minimizing incidental catches of seabirds, fully taking into consideration the implementation codes agreed internationally.

2. Present situation of fisheries subject to the NPOA-Seabirds

(1) Types of fisheries

Longline fisheries in Japan can be classified into categories based on target fish species and size of fishing vessels. For the most part, these fisheries are managed by the national or prefectural governments according to the range and scale of operations.

Fisheries having operational interactions with seabirds include distant-water tuna longline fisheries, near-shore tuna longline fisheries, and coastal tuna longline fisheries. Other small-size longline fishing operations in Japan's coastal and offshore areas, despite their low level of interaction with seabirds,

are also subject to the NPOA-Seabirds in order to comprehensively address the incidental seabird catch issue.

(2) Present situation of fisheries

(i) Distant-water longline tuna fishery

This pelagic longline fishery uses fishing vessels of 120 tons or greater and is managed on a vessel-by-vessel basis by the national government. Major areas of operation include the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans.

(ii) Near-shore longline tuna fishery

This pelagic longline fishery (as distinguished from the coastal tuna longline fishery in (iii)) uses fishing vessels between 10-120 tons, and is managed on a vessel-by-vessel basis by the national government. The areas of operation are Japan's near-shore waters and the Central and Western Pacific.

(iii) Coastal longline tuna fishery

This pelagic longline fishery operates primarily in Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone, using fishing vessels of 10-20 tons, and is managed on a vessel-by-vessel basis by the national government.

(iv) Other longline fisheries operating in Japan’s coastal and offshore areas

These are small-scale longline fisheries managed primarily by prefectural governments. Their operations in Japan's coastal and offshore areas are characterized by single-day trips and limited seasons.

3. Species of seabirds relevant to Japanese longline fishing

(i) Southern Ocean

In longline tuna fisheries in the Southern Ocean, albatrosses and shearwaters are caught incidentally. To date, 9 species of albatrosses (Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*), Royal Albatross (*D. epomophora*), Black-browed Albatross (*D. melanophrys*), Buller's Albatross (*D. bulleri*), Shy Albatross (*D. cauta*), Yellow-nosed Albatross (*D. chlororhynchos*), Grey-headed Albatross (*D. chrysostoma*), Sooty Albatross (*Phoebetria fusca*), Light-mantled Sooty Albatross (*P. palpebrata*)) and 6 species of Shearwaters (Southern Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*), Northern Giant Petrel (*M. halli*), Cape Petrel (*Daption capense*), Grey Petrel (*Procellaria cinerea*), White-chinned Petrel (*P. aequinoctialis*), and Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus carnipes*)) may have been subjected to incidental catch. These seabird species are widely distributed in the circumpolar areas south of the subtropical convergence and have breeding grounds primarily located between 35 and 55 degrees S, most of which are on remote oceanic islands.

(ii) North Pacific

Three species of albatrosses (Black-footed Albatross *(Phoebastria nigripes),* Laysan Albatross (*Phoebastria immutabilis*), and Short-tailed Albatross (*Diomedea albatrus*)) are distributed in the North Pacific, and their breeding grounds are found in the waters around Japan. The breeding grounds of the

Black-footed Albatross and the Laysan Albatross are mainly found in the Hawaiian Islands. At sea, the Black-footed Albatross is distributed on the southeastern side of the North Pacific, and the Laysan Albatross is distributed on the northwestern side. The Short-tailed Albatross is reported to breed in two locations in the waters around Japan, and juvenile birds are found at sea in the waters of the Northeastern Pacific.

Given that breeding grounds exist in the waters around Japan, incidental catch of seabirds by longline tuna fishing vessels in near-shore areas of Japan may occur during the breeding season (autumn-spring).

4. Guidance, outreach and educational activities

The longline fishing industry, with the support of the national government and scientists, is compiling and distributing materials such as booklets and water-proof pamphlets to be used onboard fishing vessels. The industry is also organizing seminars for fishing vessel crew and shipowners to inform and educate them about the NPOA-Seabirds.

In the future, increased efforts are required to improve educational and outreach materials, and provide explanations directly to the fishers using these materials (in the form of briefing sessions, visits to the vessels when in port, etc.) in a planned and organized manner.

5. Research and development

In Japan, the following research and development has been carried out with a view to reducing incidental catch of seabirds:

(1) Development of methods to avoid incidental catch

The following methods to avoid incidental seabird catches are being developed:

(i) Improvement of the tori-pole

Efforts are underway to improve the effectiveness of the tori-pole now being used and to make it applicable to small-scale fishing vessels as well.

(ii) Seabird scaring devices

Research is underway to determine effective means to scare seabirds away from areas of fishing operations through the use of stimulants such as noise and light.

(iii) Fishing gear modification to accelerate the sinking speed of baited hooks

This method is designed to shorten the time during which seabirds can interact with hooks at the surface by increasing the sinking speed of the baited hooks.

(iv) Underwater line setting

This method is designed to shorten the time during which seabirds can interact with hooks at the surface by setting baited hooks directly underwater and avoiding casting them through the air.

(v) Line setting at night
Line setting is conducted in darkness at night to avoid feeding activity of seabirds which search for food visually during the daytime.

(vi) Colored bait
Bait is dyed to render it less visible to seabirds when cast into the water.

(vii) Side setting
Main lines and branch lines are set from the side of fishing vessels to avoid propeller turbulence. Seabirds are deterred to approach baited hooks immediately after casting due to the bird scaring effects of the vessel.

(2) Assessment and enhancement of mitigation method effectiveness

The effectiveness of mitigation methods is assessed and improvements are ensured through experimental and actual fishing activities.

(3) Studies on seabird ecology at sea including behavior during interaction with longline fisheries

Information is collected on the distribution, movements and feeding behavior of seabirds to aid in reducing incidental catches.

6. Improvement of breeding ground habitat and promotion of reproduction

In order to conserve seabirds, it is essential not only to regulate fisheries but also to improve breeding ground habitats in order to encourage reproduction. A well-known example is the improvement of breeding ground habitat on Torishima Island in the Izu Islands. The project has produced noteable results in the recovery of the Short-tailed Albatross through such steps as stabilizing and preventing mud flows and revegetation. Also, efforts have been made to obtain accurate information on seabird ecology and breeding conditions on Torishima Island and to disperse the locations of breeding colonies to more stable and suitable areas. In the years to come, Japan will continuously promote research as described above aimed at enhancing the breeding of seabirds and improving their breeding habitat.

Impacts on seabird populations caused by factors other than fisheries, may include among other things, deterioration of the breeding ground habitat (e.g. erosion and landslides; introduction of exotic species), climate change, and marine pollution (e.g. reduced hatching success caused by contaminants; digestion of marine debris such as plastic fragments).

7. Collection of information, research and monitoring

As projects to facilitate the implementation of the measures in points 5-6 above, the following steps are being taken:

(i) Collection of data on incidental catch by government vessels and scientific observers and development of databases

(ii) Collection of information on the ecology and population status of seabirds (surveys of migration, research on population distribution, studies on dietary

habits of seabirds by means of stable isotope analysis, and development of databases on breeding and habitat of seabirds.)

8. Promotion of international cooperation

(1) Japan, a traditional fishing nation, has accumulated substantial experience with fishery stock management as well as a wealth of knowledge regarding by-catch species and incidental catch of various marine living resources. It has strived for development and dissemination of realistic and effective methods to avoid incidental catches of seabirds by longline fisheries.

Japan's knowledge and experience have already been utilized by other countries and regional fisheries management organizations. Japan is committed to continue to respond to the need for cooperation on the topic of avoiding incidental seabird catches, through the government's support to, and dialogue with, other countries especially developing countries.

(2) Some regional fisheries management organizations, such as the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), are taking international regulatory measures to reduce incidental catches of seabirds. Japan will continue to strictly comply with these international obligations.

(3) With respect to current problems pertaining to fishery resource management such as Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing activities and the presence of flag-of-convenience (FOC) fishing vessels, it is assumed that no arrangements have been made for reduction of incidental catches because their fishing activities circumvent all applicable conservation and management measures. Therefore, Japan will strive to accurately assess the impact caused by fisheries conducted outside of international regulations and will continue cooperation through FAO and regional fisheries management organizations so that appropriate arrangements may be implemented.

(4) Furthermore, Japan is promoting cooperation with other concerned countries for collection of information on distribution, habitats and ecology of seabirds, research, and monitoring and implementation of conservation measures, and is committed to continue these efforts in the future.

9. Measures to reduce incidental catch

Japan will implement measures to minimize incidental catch of seabirds in accordance with the following basic policy, also taking into account the presence and behavior of seabirds in specific areas as well as the location of breeding grounds.

(i) The experiences accumulated by fishers over a long period of time in implementing measures to reduce incidental seabird catches should be respected. Fishers should be encouraged to improve and implement such measures voluntarily.

(ii) In so far as practicable, avoidance measures that have high selectivity and are environmentally safe and cost effective should be developed.
(iii) Consideration should be given to reducing operational burdens and risks to fishers.

(1) Distant-water longline tuna fishery, near-shore longline tuna fishery, and coastal longline tuna fishery

(A) Southern bluefin tuna fishery area

Japan already requires fishing vessels targeting southern bluefin tuna to use bird scaring streamers (the tori-pole streamer) in order to avoid incidental catches of seabirds. In addition to this, the following measures will be taken:

(a) Every effort should be made to release birds which are still alive when brought onboard the vessel and, if possible, remove the hook to avoid further injury to the bird.
(b) Disposal of offal from the vessels during line setting should be avoided as much as possible. In unavoidable cases, methods to avoid further attraction of seabirds to baited hooks should be employed, such as setting the line from the opposite end of the vessel.
(c) One or more of the following avoidance measures should be applied, taking into account the presence and approach of seabirds to the vessel and sea conditions:
(i) In bait casting, the use of weighted branch lines or cones which enable bait to sink as quickly as possible after line setting;
(ii) the use of an automatic bait-casting machine and properly thawed bait;
(iii) night line setting;
(iv) blue dyed bait;
(v) waterjet devices; and
(vi) side setting.

(B) Pacific Ocean north of 20 degrees N

The following measures shall be taken by longline tuna fishing operations north of 20 degrees N in the Pacific Ocean.

(a) Every effort should be made to release birds which are still alive when brought onboard the vessel and, if possible, remove the hook to avoid further injury to the bird.
(b) Disposal of offal from the vessels during line setting should be avoided as much as possible. In unavoidable cases, methods to avoid further attraction of seabirds to baited hooks should be employed, such as setting the line from the opposite end of the vessel.
(c) One or more of the following avoidance measures should be applied, taking into account the presence and approach of seabirds to the vessel and sea conditions:
(i)the use of streaming devices (the tori-pole streamer) or other impediments to settling on the sea surface, such as buoys and wooden boards, which will obstruct interactions between seabirds and bait at the time of line setting;
(ii) night line setting;

(iii) the use of weighted branch lines or cones which enable bait to sink as quickly as possible after line setting;
(iv) the use of an automatic bait-casting machine or properly thawed bait (For distant-water longline tuna fisheries, both of them are necessary);
(v) blue dyed bait;
(vi) waterjet devices; and
(vii) side setting.

(C) Torishima Island Special Area (within 20 nautical miles of Torishima Island) (October-May)

In Torishima Island Special Area, in addition to the requirement to implement mitigation measure (B)(c)(i) above, one or more measures from (B)(c)(ii) to (vii) must be taken from October through May.

(D) Other areas

In areas other than those mentioned above, efforts should be made to take appropriate mitigation measures if there is concern about the occurrence of incidental catch of seabirds.

(2) Other longline fishing

Fishers are requested to take the following measures with respect to other longline fisheries operating in Japan's coastal/offshore areas:

(a) Every effort should be made to release birds which are still alive when brought onboard the vessel and, if possible, remove the hook to avoid further injury to the bird.
(b) Disposal of offal from the vessels during line setting should be avoided as much as possible. In unavoidable cases, methods to avoid further attraction of seabirds to baited hooks should be employed, such as setting the line from the opposite end of the vessel.
(c) If operations are conducted between October and May in the Torishima Island Special Area, avoidance measure (i) below is required and one or more of measures (ii)-(vii) should be implemented, taking into account the presence and approach of seabirds to the vessel and sea conditions.
(i) the use of streaming devices (the tori-pole streamer) or other impediments to settling on the sea surface, such as buoys and wooden boards, which will obstruct interactions between seabirds and bait at the time of line setting;
(ii) night line setting,
(iii) the use of weighted branch lines or cones which enable bait to sink as quickly as possible after line setting
(iv) the use of an automatic bait-casting machine and properly thawed bait,
(v) blue dyed bait,
(vi) waterjet devices, and
(vii) side setting.

*****Further, with respect to all of the fisheries mentioned above, the government requests fishers to provide information on any incidental catches of seabird species which have a high potential for incidental catch in the offshore waters of Japan.