

Albatross conservation advanced

Efforts to conserve seabirds took a significant step forward on 6 November 2003 when the Republic of South Africa ratified the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) at a ceremony at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra.

The Republic of South Africa is the fifth country to become a party, meeting the threshold for ACAP's entry into force, which occurred on 1 February 2004. South Africa joins Australia, New Zealand, Ecuador and Spain as a party to ACAP. South Africa played a key role in the negotiation of ACAP and is home to many important populations of albatrosses and petrels, including those on the subantarctic Prince Edward Islands.

Albatrosses and petrels are among the most threatened group of birds in the world. Of the world's 24 species of albatrosses 83% are considered to be endangered, which compares with 11% of bird species overall. For some populations, such as the Macquarie Island wandering albatross and Amsterdam albatross, numbers remain so low (less than 10 and 15 breeding pairs each year, respectively) that they remain threatened with imminent extinction. While individual nations are taking measures to protect albatrosses and petrels, these birds are susceptible to threats throughout their range. Conservation action by one nation acting alone

cannot be effective in conserving highly migratory species such as albatrosses and petrels — clearly international action is required.



Above: HE Mr Anthony Mongalo, High Commissioner for the Republic of South Africa, hands the instrument of ratification to the Honourable Mark Vaile MP, Minister for Trade. The ceremony also marked the entry into force of the agreement.

Below: Black-browed albatross in flight.

Albatrosses and petrels are threatened globally at sea and on land. Direct contact with fishing operations, eating or being entangled in marine debris, pollution, and over-fishing of their prey are major threats. In breeding colonies, they are threatened by predators, habitat damage and competition with other animals for nest space, parasites and disease.

The Agreement's entry into force will allow members to implement an action plan

to protect critical habitat, control non-native species detrimental to albatrosses and petrels, introduce measures to reduce the incidental catch of seabirds in long-line fisheries, and support research into the effective conservation of albatrosses and petrels.

ACAP also recognises that there are existing international instruments that contain some conservation measures relevant to sea birds, for example, the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources and the Food and Agriculture Organisation's International Plan of Action for reducing incidental catch of birds in longline fisheries.

ACAP is a good example of the way in which cooperative and coordinated working relationships between international instruments can enhance inter-governmental efforts to protect our shared environment.

Australia is currently acting as the Interim Secretariat for the Agreement, and will continue in this role until the first meeting of the parties is held, when the location of the permanent secretariat is determined by the Parties. The Agreement requires that the first meeting of the parties be held with a year of its entry into force.

ANTARCTIC AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY, AAD



KIERAN LAWTON

from page 41

based outside Australia. In 1979, The Frost Inquiry recommendations were endorsed by the Fraser Government, which repealed the Whaling Act 1960 and enacted the Whale Protection Act 1980, handing whales policy to the Minister for Science and the Environment (previously the domain of the Minister for Industry).

Australia has since supported the moratorium on commercial whaling and the

establishment of the two existing IWC whale sanctuaries, in the Indian Ocean (established 1979) and the Southern Ocean (1994).

Meanwhile, the South Pacific Whale Sanctuary, first proposed by Australia and New Zealand in 2000, has received majority support in the IWC, but not yet the three-quarter majority required for its establishment. A similar fate has met Brazil's and Argentina's proposed South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary.

At home, the current Australian Government established the Australian Whale Sanctuary: making it illegal to kill, injure or interfere with whales, dolphins or porpoises in 10.8 million square kms of Australian waters.

Twenty-five years after Australia's decision to bring an end to whaling, the Australian Government has reiterated its commitment to protect whales at home, and to pursue a permanent international ban on commercial whaling.