

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels



Albatrosses and some of the larger petrels of the southern hemisphere are among the most threatened birds in the world. The international Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) came into force on 1 February 2004, with the aim of achieving and maintaining favourable conservation status for defined albatross and petrel species. The First Session of the 'meeting of Parties' to ACAP was held in Hobart from 10–12 November 2004.

The meeting was attended by five of the six Parties which have currently ratified the Agreement: Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom. Three 'Signatory' states (Argentina, Brazil and France) and three 'Range' states (states through which albatrosses and petrels range – Namibia, Norway and the United States) were also present, as well as representatives from 10 non-government organisations.

Australia has acted as interim Secretariat for ACAP since February 2001 and at the meeting, offered to host the Secretariat permanently in Hobart. The offer was greeted with unanimous support and a process for the establishment of the Secretariat was agreed. Australia will continue to provide the interim Secretariat until the permanent Secretariat is established.

An Advisory Committee was also established to provide scientific, technical and other advice to the meeting of Parties. The committee will have a role in guiding the implementation of the action plan for the Agreement and ensuring that ACAP is effective and influential internationally.

As required under the Agreement, Parties agreed on criteria to define emergency situations for albatrosses and petrels and assign responsibility for action. An emergency situation is: *an unexpected event that threatens albatrosses and petrels at the population level; requires urgent conservation measures; is of such magnitude that it exceeds the immediate capacity of the affected country to adequately respond; and for which international resources and/or assistance are required.* The emergency criteria were agreed as interim measures and referred to the ACAP Advisory Committee for further consideration.

Mortality from interactions with fishing vessels is the most serious threat to albatrosses and petrels and is a chronic threat, rather than an acute situation to be addressed by emergency criteria. Fisheries interactions were accordingly identified as a priority issue to be addressed under the ACAP action plan. Much work has been undertaken and is ongoing to mitigate

adverse effects of fishing activities on albatrosses and petrels. To avoid duplication, the Advisory Committee will be tasked with making recommendations for the integration of ACAP with existing initiatives so as to enhance and advance them.

Establishing effective and positive influence on regional fisheries monitoring organisations is a key challenge. Offers of collaboration have already been received from the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources and the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna; and two organisations with ongoing programmes of liaison with regional fisheries monitoring organisations, to promote seabird conservation – BirdLife International and the Southern Seabird Solutions Trust.

Other priority actions identified under the ACAP plan relate to the protection of breeding sites, in particular the adverse effects on albatrosses and petrels of non-native species introduced to some breeding areas.

Australia will host the first meeting of the ACAP Advisory Committee in Hobart in July 2005. The meeting will hear progress reports from working groups established to review the status and trends of albatrosses and petrels covered by the Agreement (in collaboration with the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research Group of Experts on Birds); and to establish an agreed taxonomy for albatrosses in consultation with relevant experts.

The challenge now is to build on the consensus and co-operation achieved at the first meeting so that progress can be made towards the goals of ACAP. Because of the small number of Parties currently signed up, the funding for the Agreement is modest. The Secretariat will therefore aim to promote ACAP and encourage more Signatory and Range states to ratify the Agreement. The second meeting of Parties is due to take place late in 2006 and the UK hopes to host this meeting.

To find out more about ACAP please visit <http://www.acap.aq> or contact Barry Baker or Helen Riley at the interim Secretariat: barry.baker@aad.gov.au; Ph: +61 3 6232 3407.

—STEVE CAMPBELL and HELEN RILEY
Interim Secretariat to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

The international Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels aims to achieve and maintain favourable conservation status for a range of albatross and petrel species including this wandering albatross, *Diomedea exulans*. CHRISTOPHER CLARKE