

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

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Fisheries Agency  
Government of Japan

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1. Introduction (Basic Principles and Objectives)

- (1) Japan, as a responsible fishing nation, confirms the recognition of the international community that fisheries are an important industry playing “the significant role in providing food security for the world, both through food supplies and through economic and social well-being” (Kyoto Declaration on Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security and its Action Plan). In addition, Japan duly respects the international agreement that “the States should 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) and the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) that calls for promotion of contribution of fisheries to food security.
- (2) Japan shares the concern with the international community regarding the impact of incidental catch of seabirds in various longline fishing conducted by many countries. Therefore, Japan has been encouraging fishers to develop creative solutions to this issue on a voluntary basis, such as the use of streamer devices (tori-pole streamer) developed by a Japanese fisher for minimizing incidental catch of seabirds, with the aim to further decrease incidental catch of seabirds.
- (3) Japan adopted an effective and practicable NPOA-Seabirds in 2001 after analyzing the impact of Japanese longline fishing on seabirds objectively and scientifically, and taking into account the FAO International Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (IPOA-Seabirds) from the viewpoint to promote international cooperation toward reducing incidental catch of seabirds.
- (4) In developing NPOA-Seabirds in 2001, Japan set a goal of action aiming “to achieve full implementation of mitigation measures to reduce incidental catch of seabirds by 2015.” In addition, whenever new mitigation measures were introduced by regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) for reducing incidental catch of seabirds, it promptly introduced those mitigation measures through the revisions of the ministry ordinance. As a result, all the mitigation measures agreed by respective RFMOs have been introduced in Japan.
- (5) Japan will strive to ensure through implementation of the NPOA-Seabirds, develop more efficient mitigation measures, and continue guidance, outreach and educational activities for proper implementation of those mitigation measures, in order to realize further reduction of incidental catch of seabirds.

## 2. The present state of fisheries subjected to NPOA-Seabirds

### (1) Types of fisheries subjected to NPOA-Seabirds

Longline fisheries in Japan is classified by target species, scale of fishing vessels and so forth, and many of them are managed either by the national or prefectural governments in accordance with the scope and scale of operation.

When the actual state of Japan's fisheries is considered, the type of fisheries for which measures for incidental catch of seabirds are required center on (i) distant-water tuna longline fishing, (ii) near-shore tuna longline fishing, and (iii) coastal tuna longline fishing. Furthermore, another type, i.e. (iv) other longline fisheries operating with small-size boats in the Japanese coastal and offshore areas, will be included in NPOA-Seabirds as part of extensive approach toward the issue of incidental catch, although virtually very little incidental catch occurs in these fisheries viewed from their operation state.

### (2) State of fisheries

#### (i) Distant-water longline tuna fishery

This pelagic longline fishery uses fishing vessels of 120 tons or greater and is managed by the national government under the license system. Major areas of operation include the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans.

#### (ii) Near-shore longline tuna fishery

This pelagic longline fishery (excluding coastal tuna longline fishery in (iii)) uses fishing vessels between 10-120 tons, and is managed by the national government under the license system. 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 by the national government under the license system.

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

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

## 3. Species of seabirds relevant to Japanese longline fishing

### (i) Southern Hemisphere

In longline tuna fisheries in the Southern Hemisphere, it has been pointed out that 19 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 (*Phoebastria fusca*), Light-mantled Sooty Albatross (*P. palpebrata*), etc.) as well as 7 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*), etc.) 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 breed 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 Northeastern Pacific. Given the fact that their 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. Mitigation measures against incidental catch

Appropriate mitigation measures shall be adopted thoroughly to minimize incidental catch of seabirds, based on the following basic policy, taking into consideration migration patterns and breeding areas of seabirds.

#### (Basic policy)

- (i) Mitigation measures shall be implemented thoroughly in the area under jurisdiction of RFMOs pursuant to their resolutions.
- (ii) In the areas outside the jurisdiction of RFMOs, efforts shall be made to encourage improvement and implementation of mitigation measures on a voluntary basis, giving due respect to many years of experience of fishers who have been implementing mitigation measures.
- (iii) As far as possible, efforts shall be made to develop selective and environmentally safe mitigation measures with high effects relative to costs.
- (iv) Due consideration shall be given to alleviate the burdens of fishers and ensure their safety.

#### (1) Distant-water tuna longline fishing, near-shore tuna longline fishing, coastal tuna longline fishing

##### (a) all areas

Every effort shall be made to release alive seabirds caught alive on board the fishing vessels, and, where possible, to remove the hooks in a way not to risk the bird's life.

**(b) Western and Central Pacific area**

When fishing is operated using pelagic longline in the area north of 23 degrees North and south of 30 degrees South, at least two types of the following mitigation measures shall be used, and at least one out of (i)-(iv) shall be used. (Note: When (i) is used or the streaming devices are set on both sides of the vessel with the branch line in the center, it is regarded that two types of mitigation measures were used, while duplicated selection of weighted branch lines should not take place.)

- (i) Side setting with weighted branch lines using a side streaming device (tori-pole/tori-line)
- (ii) Line setting at night
- (iii) Streaming device (tori-pole/tori-line)
- (iv) Weighted branch lines
- (v) Blue-dyed bait
- (vi) Line shooting machine
- (vii) Underwater line shooting machine
- (viii) Offal disposal management

**(c) Indian Ocean area**

When fishing operation takes place using pelagic longlines in the area south of 30 degrees South, at least two type of the following mitigation measures shall be used, and at least one out of (i)-(iii) shall be used.

- (i) Line setting at night
- (ii) Streaming devices (tori-pole/tori-line)
- (iii) Weighted branch lines
- (iv) Blue-color dyed squid bait
- (v) Offal disposal management
- (vi) Line shooting devices (line shooting machine or underwater line shooting machine)

**(d) Atlantic area**

Streaming devices shall be used when fishing operation is conducted using pelagic longlines in the area south of 20 degrees South

**(e) Southern Bluefin Tuna fishing ground**

Fishing vessels targeting southern bluefin tuna should use streaming devices to reduce incidental catch of seabirds.

**(2) Other longline fisheries**

Regarding other longline fisheries operated in Japan's coastal and offshore area, we request the following measures to be implemented.

- (a) Every effort shall be made to release alive seabirds caught alive on board the fishing vessels, and, where possible, to remove the hooks in a way not to risk the bird's life.
- (b) Disposal of offal from the vessel shall be avoided during line setting as much as possible. In unavoidable cases, the methods shall be used to divert the attention of seabirds from baited hooks, such as disposing the offal from the other side from line setting.
- (c) When fishing is carried out from October through May in specified area (the area 20 miles from Torishima Island), mitigation measure (i) from the following list shall be made obligatory in consideration of migration situation of seabirds and sea conditions, and at least one out of (ii)-(vii) shall be selected.
  - (i) Streaming devices (tori-pole/tori-line)
  - (ii) Line setting at night
  - (iii) Use of weighted branch lines or cones
  - (iv) Use of automatic bait feeding machine or properly defrosted bait
  - (v) Blue-color dyed bait
  - (vi) Line shooting devices
  - (vii) Side setting

## 5. Guidance, outreach and educational activities

- (1) 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 ship-owners to inform and educate them about NPOA-Seabirds.
- (2) In line with the obligations to implement mitigation measures for reducing incidental catch of seabirds region by region following the amendment of the ministry ordinance in 2008, pamphlets illustrating detailed specifications as stipulated by respective RFMOs will be developed and distributed to fishers in order to promote proper implementation of the mitigation measures in each region.
- (3) Efforts will be made to introduce mitigation measures for reducing incidental catch properly through improvement of outreach and educational materials and direct explanations to fishers (briefing sessions, visits to fishing vessels at the time of port entry, etc.)

## 6. Research and development

In Japan, the following research and development are being carried out with a view to reducing incidental catch of seabirds and recovering the bird population.

- (1) Development of the methods to reduce incidental catch

Japan has developed a variety of methods to reduce incidental catch of seabirds. Further research and development will be advanced with emphasis on the following.

(a) Improvement of streaming devices (tori-pole/tori-line)

Improvement is underway to enhance the effectiveness of tori-pole now being used and also to enable its use on small-size fishing vessels.

(b) Seabirds scaring device

Research has been carried out on what kind of devices will be effective to scare seabirds away from fishing operation sites using acoustic and light stimuli.

(c) Device to accelerate the sinking speed of baited hooks

This method is designed to shorten the time for seabirds to catch baits by accelerating the sinking speed of hooks

(d) Underwater line setting

This method is designed to shorten the time for seabirds to catch baits by shooting hooks with bait in the water.

(e) Line setting at night

Line setting will be conducted in darkness at night since seabirds search for food visually during the daytime.

(f) Colored bait

Bait is dyed to render it less visible to seabirds when it is cast into the water.

(g) Side setting

Main lines and branch lines are set from the side of fishing vessels to avoid propeller turbulence. Seabirds are deterred from approaching baited hooks immediately after line casting due to bird scaring effects of the vessel.

(2) Assessment and improvement of the methods to reduce incidental catch

The methods to reduce incidental catch will be assessed and improved through experiments at sea by using experiment vessels and actually-operating fishing vessels.

(3) At-sea research (ecology of seabirds and actual state of incidental catch)

Information is collected on the distribution, movements and feeding behavior of seabirds in the area where incidental catch could occur, in order to promote reduction of incidental catch.

7. Improvement of breeding ground habitats and promotion of reproduction

(1) In order to conserve the seabird population, it is essential not only to regulate fisheries but also to improve breeding ground habitats and encourage reproduction(\*1). To this end, Japan will advance research aimed at enhancing the breeding of seabirds and promote conservation measures to improve their

breeding habitats.

\*1 For example, improvement of the breeding habitats of seabirds, such as removal of mud flows and promotion of revegetation, on Torishima Island in the Izu Islands had noticeable effects for the recovery of seabird population. Also, efforts were made to obtain accurate information on seabird ecology and breeding conditions on Torishima Island and to disperse the locations of breeding colonies of Albatrosses to more stable and suitable areas.

- (2) Impacts on seabird populations caused by non-fisheries factors may include deterioration of the breeding ground habitats (e.g. erosion and landslides; introduction of exotic species), global warming, and marine pollution (e.g. reduced hatching success caused by contaminants; digestion of marine debris such as plastic fragments). Exchange of views will be made among experts and others concerned with the aim to implement proper measures to cope with those problems.

## 8. Collection of information, research and monitoring

In order to facilitate the implementation of the measures in 6 and 7 above, the following steps will be taken:

- (a) Collection of data by research vessels belonging to the national and prefectural governments and other organizations;
- (b) Collection of information and data by scientific researchers on board fishing vessels;
- (c) Mandatory descriptions of information regarding incidental catch of seabirds in logbook by distant-water and near-shore tuna longline fishing vessels, and;
- (d) Collection of information on the ecology and population status of seabirds (surveys of migration patterns, stock distribution by sighting, research on dietary habits of seabirds by means of stable isotope analysis, and development of databases on breeding and habitats of seabirds.)

## 9. Promotion of international cooperation

- (1) Japan, a traditional fishing nation, has accumulated substantial experience and knowledge regarding 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 reduce incidental catch of seabirds by longline fishing. Much of Japan's experience and knowledge, e.g. tori-pole, has already been used by other countries and RFMOs. Japan is committed itself to continue cooperation, as necessary, regarding reduction of incidental catch of seabirds through technological assistance mainly to developing countries and dialogue at RFMOs.
- (2) As many RFMOs have adopted binding regulation measures for reduction of incidental catch of seabirds, Japan revised its ministry ordinance in 2008 in order to



ensure thorough compliance with those international measures. Japan will continue efforts in this regard in the years ahead.

- (3) In addition, Japan will continue cooperation through such fora as FAO and respective RFMOs to accurately assess the impact of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) and flag-of-convenience (FOC) fishing vessels so that appropriate arrangement could be implemented.
- (4) Furthermore, Japan is promoting coordination with countries concerned regarding collection of information on seabird distribution and habitats/ecology and implementation of research, monitoring and protective measures, and will continue its effort in this regard as well.