

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

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**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 (Principle and objective)

(1) Japan, as a responsible fishing nation, confirms the recognition of the international community that "the significant role in providing food security for the world, both through food supplies and through economic and social well-being" (Kyoto Declaration and Plan of Action on Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security). 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 is concerned about the impact of incidental catch of seabirds by longline fisheries of many nations including Japan. Japan shares this concern with the international community. Regarding conservation of seabirds, Japan recognizes the necessity of, and is promoting the comprehensive approach which includes conservation of breeding environment and management of the impact of fisheries.

(3) With their voluntary willingness to avoid interactions of seabirds with fishing gear, Japanese fishers have contributed to develop streamer devices (Tori-pole and Tori-line) and practically improve weighted branch lines in pelagic longline fisheries. At present as well, Japan is encouraging fishers to develop innovative techniques for the solutions of this issue. Japan is developing and improving the technique to minimize incidental catch which satisfies with regional and biological characteristics of the species subject to NPOA-Seabirds, while alleviating burdens on fishers and ensuring their safety.

(4) Under these circumstances, Japan instituted in 2001 the effective and practical National Plan of Action for reducing incidental catch of seabirds in Japan's longline fishing (NPOA-Seabirds) in accordance with the FAO International Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (IPOA-Seabirds) adopted in 1999, by analyzing the impacts of Japanese longline fishing on seabirds objectively and scientifically in order to promote international cooperation toward reducing incidental catch of seabirds. After instituting NPOA-Seabirds, Japan has revised it with the aim to effectively cope with the changes of the situation surrounding this issue.

In addition, Japan have fishers comply with any measures when new measures to reduce incidental catch of seabirds are introduced at regional fisheries management

organizations (RFMOs), by revising regulations.

(5) NPOA-Seabirds is aimed at reducing incidental catch of seabirds by implementing it in cooperation with the international community. Specifically, NPOA-Seabirds is aimed at reducing incidental catch of seabirds impacted by longline fisheries in all fishing areas, by contributing to the development of mitigation measures for incidental catch of seabirds and steady implementation of such measures at each RFMOs that are compatible both with fishing activities and conservation of seabirds, taking into account the factors such as the regional differences in species composition of seabirds (e.g. presence/absence of deep diving species) and the size of fishing vessels.

2. Fisheries subjected to NPOA-Seabirds

(1) Types of fisheries subjected to NPOA-Seabirds

Pelagic longline fisheries are managed either by the national or prefectural governments depending on the size of fishing vessels and operation areas and other factors.

Of these, when considering the actual state of operation, the types of fisheries requiring actions with respect to incidental catch of seabirds are (i) distant-water tuna longline fishery, (ii) offshore tuna longline fishery, and (iii) coastal tuna longline fishery. Other longline fisheries operating in Japan's coastal and offshore areas using small-size fishing vessels which are managed by prefectural governors are not included in NPOA-Seabirds because it is reported that incidental catches of seabirds are rare for these fisheries.

(2) Status of fisheries subjected to NPOA-Seabirds

(i) Distant-water longline tuna fishery

This pelagic longline fishery uses fishing vessels of 120 tons or larger and is managed by the national government under the license system. Their fishing grounds are the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean.

(ii) Offshore tuna longline fishery

This pelagic longline fishery excluding coastal tuna longline fishery in (iii) uses fishing vessels between 10 and 120 tons, and is managed by the national government under the license system. Their fishing ground is the Western and Central Pacific Ocean including Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

(iii) Coastal tuna longline fishery

This pelagic longline fishery operates primarily in Japan's EEZ using fishing vessels of 10-20 tons. They are managed by the national government under the registration system.

3. Species of seabirds relevant to Japanese longline fishing

Major seabirds with concern of being caught incidentally by Japanese longline fisheries are albatrosses and shearwaters. In the Southern Hemisphere, Japan promotes evaluation, improvement and dissemination of mitigation measures for incidental catch of seabirds which had been introduced at RFMOs, bearing in mind the compatibility of fishing activities with conservation of seabirds. In the North Pacific, Japan promotes conservation of seabirds through comprehensive approach which includes fishery management and conservation of nesting environment, while monitoring the nesting grounds of Albatrosses inhabiting the Japanese territory.

4. Mitigation measures for incidental catch of seabirds

To implement appropriate mitigation measures thoroughly to minimize incidental

catch of seabirds, Japan follows basic policy below, in cooperation with the international community and taking into consideration the migration patterns and breeding areas of seabirds.

(Basic policy)

(i) Mitigation measures shall be implemented thoroughly in the area under jurisdiction of the RFMOs and/or within EEZ of foreign country pursuant to their resolutions and/or the regulations imposed by the coastal state;

(ii) As far as possible, efforts shall be made to develop selective, environmentally safe and cost effective mitigation measures, and have them adopted at the RFMOs. When the measures are developed, creative efforts by fishers are highlighted and measures should be applicable; and

(iii) Due consideration shall be given to alleviate the burdens on fishers and to ensure their safety.

The measures taken by fisheries subjected to NPOA-Seabirds, taking the above factors into consideration, are given in the Attachment.

5.Guidance, outreach and educational activities

(1) For the outreach of NPOA-Seabirds, Japan will encourage and assist relevant organizations in developing and distributing materials such as booklets and water-proof pamphlets for use onboard regarding incidental catch of seabirds as well as holding of seminars on mitigation of incidental catch of seabirds for seamen and shipowners.

(2) After different types of mitigation measures for reducing incidental catch of seabirds were adopted in each RFMOs, the Ministerial Order was amended and pamphlets illustrating detailed specifications of the measures were developed in 2008. In the future, appropriate implementation of mitigation measures will be promoted through updating and improving the pamphlets and distribution of it to fishers via the longline fishing industry in a timely manner.

6. Research and development

Japan will take the following actions to ensure reduction of incidental catch of seabirds and help recovering the number of seabirds in a way compatible with the regional and biological characteristics of the species subjected to NPOA-Seabirds as well as to alleviate physical and monetary burdens on fishers and ensure their safety.

(1) Development of the methods to reduce incidental catch

Japan has developed a variety of methods to reduce incidental catch of seabirds. Further research/development and validation of effects will be advanced focusing on (a)-(c) below. As a new technique, research and development on (d) will be advanced.

(a) Improvement of streamers (Tori-pole, Tori-line)

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

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

This method is designed to shorten the time for baited hooks to be accessible to seabirds at the sea surface by accelerating the sinking speed of branch line and hooks

(e) Validation of effects of line setting at night-time

The technique to set lines during dark hours at night-time has been introduced or proposed as an optional approach to mitigate incidental catch because most seabirds search for food visually during the daytime. The effects of this technique and safety of crew, when this method is introduced, are validated.

(d) Seabird scaring device

Research and development are promoted to identify effective methods to scare seabirds and keep them away from fishing gear with using acoustic and visual stimuli.

(2) Assessment and improvement of mitigation technique for avoiding incidental catch of seabirds

Assessment are made on existing incidental catch mitigation measures and other possible techniques being developed by research institutions in Japan and overseas, through at-sea experiments using experimental vessels and commercial fishing vessels in order to improve mitigation measures.

(3) At-sea research of seabird habitats and actual state of incidental catch

Information on distribution, migration and feeding habits of seabirds in the area where there is possibility of incidental catch in order to improve mitigation measures.

7. Improvement of breeding habitats and promotion of reproduction

(1) Not only regulation of fisheries but also promotion of reproduction through improvement of breeding habitats is crucial for the conservation of seabirds. For example, in Torishima Island in Izu Islands, habitat improvement such as prevention of mud flows and promotion of revegetation were substantially contributed to the population recovery of seabirds. In Torishima Island, approaches to understand ecology and breeding conditions of albatross and diversify nesting grounds of albatross are being taken. Efforts will be continued in research and studies regarding promotion of seabird reproduction and improvement of habitats.

(2) Other than the incidental catches in fisheries, impacts on seabird stocks include deterioration of breeding habitat, (e.g. mud flows, introduction of hostile exotic species, etc.), global warming, marine pollution (e.g. lower hatching rates caused by organochlorine pollutants, ingestion of plastic debris, etc.). Exchanges of views with stakeholders and scientists are held to find out ways to cope with this situation.

8. Information collection, research monitoring

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

(a) Collection of scientific data by research vessels belonging to the national and prefectural governments and other organizations;

(b) Collection of scientific data by onboard observers;

(c) Keep logbook records of information regarding incidental catch of seabirds by distant-water and offshore tuna longline fishing vessels;

(d) Collection of information on the ecology and population status of seabirds (surveys of migration patterns and distribution by sighting, research on dietary habits of seabirds by means of stable isotope analysis, and development of databases on breeding 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 experience and knowledge regarding incidental catch of various marine living species. Much of Japan's experience and knowledge has already been used by other countries and RFMOs, including introduction of streamer devices (Tori-pole and Tori Line). Japan is committed to continue cooperation, as necessary, regarding reduction of incidental catch of seabirds through technical assistance mainly to developing countries and dialogue at the RFMOs.

(2) As many RFMOs have established international legally binding measures for reduction of incidental catch of seabirds, Japan revised its Ministerial Order in 2008 in order to ensure thorough compliance with those international regulatory measures. Japan continues efforts in this regard in the years ahead.

(3) In addition, Japan makes accurate assessment on the impact of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) and continues cooperation through such fora as the FAO and RFMOs so that appropriate arrangement may be implemented.

(4) Furthermore, Japan continues to promote coordination and cooperation with countries concerned regarding collection of information on seabird distribution and habitats/ecology and implementation of research, and protective measures.

(Attachment)

Measures to mitigate incidental catch of seabirds by distant-water, offshore and coastal tuna longline fisheries

1. Measures implemented in the entire fishing ground

Every effort are made to remove hooks from seabirds captured onboard not to threaten their survival and to release alive them as much as possible.

2. The area under jurisdiction of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) (WCPFC Area)

(1) In case operation in the area north of 23 degrees N, it is required to use at least two of the mitigation measures below, including at least one from (i)-(iv) below. In case the mitigation measures in (i) is used, or the mitigation measure in (iii) is installed on both sides of the main line, it is regarded that two types of mitigation measures were implemented.

(i) Side setting with a bird curtain and weighted branch lines

(ii) Night setting with minimum deck lighting

(iii) Tori line (standard-type or light weight-type)

(iv) Weighted branch lines

(v) Blue-dyed bait

(vi) Line shooter

(vii) Management of offal discharges

(2) In case operation takes place in the area of south of 30 degrees S, it is required to use at least two mitigation measures of the following.

(i) Night setting with minimum deck lighting

(ii) Tori line (standard-type in case the vessel length is 35m or longer; light weight-type in case the vessel length is less than 35m)

(iii) Weighted branch lines

3. The area under jurisdiction of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) (IATTC area)

In case operation in the south of the area consisting of the straight line from the convergence of north of 23 degrees N latitude (excluding the exclusive economic zone of Mexico) and the convergence of South American continent and 2 degrees N latitude to 2 degrees N latitude/95 degrees W longitude; the straight line from 2 degrees N latitude/95 degrees longitude to 15 degrees S latitude/95 degrees W longitude; the straight line from 15 degrees S latitude/95 degrees W longitude to 15 degrees S latitude/85 degrees W longitude; the straight line from 15 degrees S latitude/85 degrees W longitude to 30 degrees S latitude/85 degrees W longitude; and the straight line from 30 degrees S latitude/85 degrees W longitude to 30 degrees S latitude/150 degrees W longitude, at least two mitigation measures as given below including at least 1 from (i) - (iv) shall be used. However, when the fishing device in (i) is used, or the fishing device in (iii) is installed on both sides of the branch line (as the center), it is regarded that those two mitigation measures are implemented.

- (i) Side setting with a bird curtain and weighted branch lines
- (ii) Night setting with minimum deck lighting
- (iii) Tori line (standard-type or light weight-type)
- (iv) Weighted branch lines
- (v) Blue-dyed bait
- (vi) Line shooter
- (vii) Deep setting line shooter
- (viii) Management of offal discharge

4. The area under jurisdiction of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) (Indian Ocean area)

In case operation in the area west of 141 degrees E and south of 25 degrees S, it is required to use at least two mitigation measures of the followings.

- (i) Night setting with minimum deck lighting
- (ii) Tori line
- (iii) Weighted branch lines

5. The area under jurisdiction of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) (Atlantic area)

(1) In case operation in the area south of 20 degrees S and north of 25 degrees S, it is required to use Tori line.

(2) In case operation in the area south of 25 degrees S, it is required to use at least two mitigation measures of the followings.

- (i) Night setting with minimum deck lighting
- (ii) Tori line
- (iii) Weighted branch lines