

Antipodean Albatross. Photo: Oscar Thomas



# International Seabird Strategy

Rautaki Manu Moana



**Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government

Cover: Antipodean Albatross. *Photo: Oscar Thomas*

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# 1 Why do we need an International Seabird Strategy?

Aotearoa New Zealand is known as the “seabird capital of the world” with more seabirds nesting on our shores than anywhere else.<sup>1</sup> Our seabirds are cultural treasures, many are taonga to Māori, and are a vital part of our ocean biodiversity.

Our seabirds travel the wide oceans and connect us with other nations. They draw us together in an urgent conservation mission. Almost all (90%) of seabird species that breed in Aotearoa New Zealand are in trouble.<sup>2</sup> For many species, their key threat is fisheries bycatch, including in the high seas or in the waters of other States. Seabirds are also impacted by marine plastic ingestion, climate change affecting food availability, the effects of light pollution, and invasive predators at nest sites.

Managing fisheries impacts on seabirds will require effective engagement with other States, including to support them to address fisheries bycatch, by encouraging best practice seabird bycatch mitigation in fishing fleets.

## 2 Purpose

The purpose of the International Seabird Strategy is to:

- set direction for the New Zealand Government,<sup>3</sup> with a clear and agreed vision and objectives
- provide clear scope, principles, and criteria for prioritisation
- enable and guide action – with an adaptable framework for planning work and reviewing progress.

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<sup>1</sup> Approximately 172 seabird taxa use our waters, 96 of which breed in Aotearoa. See [here](#) for more information.

<sup>2</sup> The report [Conservation status of birds in Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021](#) reports that 90 percent of seabird species (86 of 96) are threatened with extinction or at risk of becoming threatened.

<sup>3</sup> Relevant agencies are DOC, MPI, and MFAT.

## 3 Mandate

The International Seabird Strategy will help implement existing international and domestic commitments.

### 3.1 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS); the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement; and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries

The responsibility to deal with threats to seabirds from fishing stems from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS). UNCLOS requires coastal States, like New Zealand, to ensure their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) conservation and management measures take into consideration the effects on species, such as seabirds, to maintain or restore healthy populations.<sup>4</sup> UNCLOS Article 119(1)(b) places a similar obligation on all States fishing on the high seas.<sup>5</sup> These obligations were repeated and developed in the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement<sup>6</sup> and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.2 The Convention of Biological Diversity and our national implementing policy – the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy – Te Mana o te Taiao

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) requires parties to contribute to the new global conservation targets in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including those to address wildlife extinction risk and manage fisheries sustainably.<sup>8</sup> These targets are reflected in Te Mana o te Taiao 2050 outcomes:

- “Indigenous species and their habitats across Aotearoa New Zealand are thriving.”
- “The mortality of non-target species from marine fisheries has been reduced to zero.”

### 3.3 2020 National Plan of Action (NPOA) – Seabirds

The NPOA Seabirds is Aotearoa New Zealand’s primary policy for managing fisheries impacts on seabirds. The vision of the NPOA is “New Zealand striving towards zero fishing related mortalities”. The international goal of the NPOA is “New Zealand actively engages internationally to promote measures that reduce impacts on New Zealand seabirds.”

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS): Article 61(4).

<sup>5</sup> UNCLOS 1982: Article 119(1)(b).

<sup>6</sup> Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks 1995 (UN Fish Stocks Agreement) 2001.

<sup>7</sup> FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries 1995.

<sup>8</sup> [COP15: Nations Adopt Four Goals, 23 Targets for 2030 In Landmark UN Biodiversity Agreement | Convention on Biological Diversity \(cbd.int\).](https://www.cbd.int/ COP15: Nations Adopt Four Goals, 23 Targets for 2030 In Landmark UN Biodiversity Agreement | Convention on Biological Diversity (cbd.int).)

### 3.4 Seabird measures within Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs)

Each RFMO has legally binding obligations related to the management of seabird bycatch. Relevant RFMOs include Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)<sup>9</sup>, and South Pacific Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO).

### 3.5 Other international obligations for Antipodean albatross

Under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Concerted Action for Antipodean Albatross (*Diomedea antipodensis*) was adopted in May 2020. It sets out obligations to manage fisheries bycatch, considered to be the greatest threat to Antipodean albatross, across national jurisdictions as well as in the high seas. Under the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), Antipodean albatross is classified as a “population of concern”. This requires members to take conservation measures for this population.

## 4 Scope and prioritisation

The International Seabird Strategy will initially focus on fisheries bycatch threats faced by Aotearoa New Zealand seabird species<sup>10</sup> in waters beyond our jurisdiction. Over time, other at-sea threats may also be prioritised, including marine plastic ingestion, the impacts of climate change on food availability, the effects of light pollution, and threats from wind farms. While seabirds are also affected by invasive predators at nest sites, other national programmes such as Predator Free 2050 are focused on this threat, therefore it is not a focus of the Strategy.

The Strategy sets criteria for prioritisation and identifies initial focus areas to enable immediate government work planning. Priorities include addressing fisheries bycatch on the high seas and in range state jurisdictions, and actions to protect four “ambassador species”.

### 4.1 Ambassador species

The Strategy scope covers all Aotearoa New Zealand seabirds. The selection of four ambassador species is a way of focusing efforts. This does not mean that we will only work to save those species. Rather, the selection criteria will ensure our work addresses risks for many Aotearoa New Zealand seabirds across oceans and fisheries and will enable strong and compelling conservation narratives.

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<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of this document CCAMLR is included in the list of RFMOs. CCAMLR is not an RFMO and has a wider mandate for the management of the Antarctic marine environment. However, as the body responsible for fisheries management in the Convention Area, it plays an equivalent role in the conservation of seabirds to RFMOs in other regions.

<sup>10</sup> Aotearoa seabird species are those that breed in the New Zealand.

#### 4.1.1 Criteria for selecting ambassador species

##### *Threat status*

Ambassador species are highly threatened and need urgent help. The National Threat Classification System (NZTCS) and fisheries risk assessments will be key sources of information about threat status.<sup>11</sup>

##### *Range/distribution*

Ambassador species have ranges that overlap with many other seabirds, so that reducing threats across their range will benefit many other seabird species.

##### *Scientific data*

Ambassador species are those that we have sufficient data on to enable targeted action and review outcomes.

##### *Taonga species*

Ambassador species are taonga to tangata whenua. This means particular iwi, hapū, and/or whānau have a special relationship with the species, such as through shared whakapapa and kaitiaki responsibilities to care for the taonga.

#### 4.1.2 The four ambassador species

##### *Toroa/Antipodean albatross (Diomedea antipodensis)*

Classified by the NZTCS as “Nationally Critical.” This species has an annual population decline of 5%. It ranges from South Australia to South America and is at highest risk from high seas pelagic longline fisheries in the Northern Tasman and the Eastern Central Pacific.

##### *Tākokotai/Black petrel (Procellaria parkinsoni)*

Classified by the NZTCS as “Vulnerable”. This species has one of the highest bycatch risk scores in domestic waters and is impacted by high seas fisheries and coastal longline fisheries off north-western South American nations.

##### *Toroa/Southern Buller’s albatross (Thalassarche bulleri bulleri)*

Classified by the NZTCS as “Declining”. The national seabird risk assessment ranks this species as one of the most at risk in domestic waters. The species ranges from South Australia to South America it is also heavily impacted by fisheries in the southern Tasman Sea.

##### *Kuaka/Whenua Hou diving petrel (Pelecanoides georgicus whenuahouensis)*

Classified by the NZTCS as “Nationally Critical” and threatened by vessel strikes (collisions with vessels due to light pollution-induced disorientation) in domestic and international waters. This species winters in the Southern Ocean south of Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia.

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<sup>11</sup> See the National Threat Classification System: [NZTCS](#), and the national seabird risk assessment [Seabird risk assessment, 2006–07 to 2016–17 \(mpi.govt.nz\)](#)

## 5 Strategy governance

An International Seabird Strategy Governance Group will be established and made up of directors from DOC, MPI, and MFAT, and iwi, hapū, and whānau representatives.

## 6 Treaty partnership

Treaty partnership under the Strategy will be developed with guidance from the Whāinga Amorangi framework of Te Arawhiti. Māori principles such as kaitiakitanga are ingrained in the Strategy through its principles and objectives, and the Strategy governance will ensure partnership. Regular engagement processes will enable iwi, hapū, and whānau to identify areas of work that they want to be involved in. Agencies will seek to enable their involvement where possible.

Agencies will initially focus on engaging with the iwi, hapū, and whānau that are kaitiaki of the ambassador species. However, as the Strategy covers all Aotearoa New Zealand seabirds, over time, engagement will be widened to all interested iwi, hapū, and whānau. The regional and nation-wide engagement processes for the implementation of Te Mana o te Taiao will also be used to achieve this.

# International Seabird Strategy – Rautaki Manu Moana

## ① Vision

- Seabirds of Aotearoa New Zealand are thriving and at-sea threats beyond our national waters have been addressed.

## ② Values / principles

- **Kaitiakitanga** – We enable whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori organisations to exercise kaitiakitanga over their indigenous seabirds.
- **Mahi tahi** – We work together towards our common vision as a cohesive team and build strong collaborative relationships internationally.
- **Tohungatanga** – We recognise expertise and pursue new knowledge and ideas.
- **Manaakitanga** – We build trust and inclusiveness through our actions with others.

## ③ Scope

The International Seabird Strategy will initially focus on fisheries bycatch threats faced by Aotearoa New Zealand seabird species in waters beyond our jurisdiction. Four ambassador species will provide an initial focus:

- Toroa / Antipodean albatross
- Tākaketai / black petrel
- Toroa / southern Buller's albatross
- Kuaka / Whenua Hou diving petrel

## ④ Criteria for prioritisation

- Key threats to highly vulnerable species, including ambassador species, are reduced. Threats in highest risk areas are addressed first.
- Kaitiakitanga of indigenous seabirds is exercised by whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori organisations.
- Actions are achievable and will have long-lasting positive impacts.
- Positive collaborative relationships that help achieve strategy objectives are built and maintained.

## ⑤ Objectives and measures

### Biological

1. **By 2030**, the mortality rate of ambassador species is decreasing.  
*Measures:* Adult survival, as measured through field research programmes.
2. **By 2050**, ambassador species are no longer declining.  
*Measures:* Population growth rates, as measured through field research programmes.

### Threat management

3. **By 2030**, states are implementing best practice seabird mitigation in fleets that pose a high risk to Aotearoa New Zealand seabirds, consistently and accurately monitoring and reporting, and championing best practice mitigation use internationally.  
*Measures:* Number of states demonstrating best practice.
4. **By 2050**, seabird bycatch rates are reducing towards zero.  
*Measures:* Bycatch rates reported by regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs)<sup>1</sup> or monitoring programmes of other organisations.

### Treaty partnership

5. **By 2025**, Treaty partners, whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori organisations are making contributions (consistent with their respective roles as kaitiaki) to developing Aotearoa New Zealand positions for international conversations and engaging as appropriate with international counterparts.  
*Measures:* Expression of kaitiakitanga by tangata whenua.

### Relationships and collaborations

6. **By 2025**, key states<sup>2</sup> recognise that there is an urgent need for action to protect seabirds from fisheries interactions.  
*Measures:* Number of relevant policies, regulations and actions for seabird conservation.
7. **Ongoing:** We leverage our strong strategic partnerships to:
  - Lift standards of mitigation use, monitoring and reporting in all regional fisheries management organisations where seabirds from Aotearoa New Zealand are being by caught, including those where we are not members.  
*Measures:* Number of RFMO conservation management measures (CMMs) improved.
  - Develop and improve best practice mitigation for fisheries bycatch that is relevant for all high-risk fleets.  
*Measures:* Number of trials and projects aimed at developing mitigation technologies.
8. **Ongoing:** Scientific knowledge on all threats to seabirds, including new and emerging threats, is improving.  
*Measures:* Number of research reports, risk assessments and/or workshops improving knowledge of existing and emerging threats.
9. **Ongoing:** Stakeholders are regularly engaged to support alignment and collaboration on seabird conservation.  
*Measures:* Number of stakeholder meetings and workshops.

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this document, CCAMLR is included in the list of RFMOs. CCAMLR is not an RFMO and has a wider mandate for the management of the Antarctic marine environment; however, as the body responsible for fisheries management in the Convention Area, it plays an equivalent role in the conservation of seabirds to RFMOs in other regions.

<sup>2</sup> Key states are those that have fleets that pose a high risk to our seabirds or are strategic allies in promoting seabird conservation.

## ⑥ Implementation

### Priority workstreams include:

- **RFMOs** – We work within RFMOs to lift seabird bycatch mitigation measures towards best practice as recommended by the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) and support broader efforts within RFMOs to ensure effective monitoring (independently verified) and reporting.
- **Coastal and flag states that are high risk to our seabirds** – We work with coastal and flag states to promote the use of seabird bycatch mitigation measures and monitoring within exclusive economic zones (EEZs), particularly within the range of ambassador seabirds.
- **Science and research, ACAP and mitigation innovation** – We work to strengthen support for ACAP develop and improve best practice bycatch mitigation, investigate key threats to seabirds, including new and emerging threats, and enable management actions and advocacy.
- **Best practice leadership** – We demonstrate the benefits of best practice bycatch mitigation.
- **Connecting leaders and cultures to build capacity for action** – We build high-level political engagement and leadership for seabird conservation and build capability for seabird-safe fishing.

