COMMON OCEANS
NEWS

Republic of Korea takes seabird bycatch mitigation seriously

Participants at the Review Workshop on Implementation of Seabird Bycatch Mitigation Measures – 24 October 2014.

Tuna longline operations are the single biggest threat to many albatrosses and petrels, which are accidentally hooked and drown, sometimes in large numbers, during line setting. However, there has been enormous progress in finding solutions to overcome this threat. All the 5 t-RFMOs that are partners in the Project Sustainable Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the ABNJ in the Common Oceans Program funded by the Global Environment Facility have some form of regulations requiring seabird bycatch mitigation measures to be used. ICCAT, IOTC and WCPFC require that for fishing south of 25° S or 30° S fishing vessels must use at least 2 measures to reduce impact on seabirds. Line weighting is one of 3 accepted measures, but it's controversial because of safety and possible impacts on catch rates of target species. The Project is being implemented by BirdLife International and BirdLife South Africa. Its activities, aiming to reduce seabird bycatch, intend inter alia to support fleets to find options for line weighting solutions that are safe for crew, effective for seabirds, and have no impacts on target catch rates.

A seabird bycatch workshop meeting was co-hosted in December 2013 by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and BirdLife International, in Busan, Korea. During this meeting the Republic of Korea presented work that had been done, in collaboration with BirdLife International, onboard a tuna longliner operated by Sajo Industries. This research investigated practical options for adding branchline weight to Korean-style fishing operations. The trials were successful and at the workshop, Korean officials undertook to ensure that their fleet would be in compliance with the IOTC's Resolution 12/06 when it came into force in July this year. To this end, 40 000 lead weights were ordered; these are specially designed to slide on the line and prevent safety risks to fishing crew when lines snap under tension and had been trialled onboard on 2013.

On 24 October 2014, Korea's National Fisheries Research Development Institute (NFRDI) called together representatives from Korea's tuna longline industries, fishing captains, fisheries observers and seabird bycatch mitigation experts from BirdLife International, supported by the Common Oceans tuna project, to review the 2013 research results, discuss the experiences of the trial implementation of line weighting, and to consider the need for future work onboard. The workshop was opened by Dr Jong Keun Shin, Director General Fundamental Research (NFRDI) and was attended by 32 people. There are concerns that adding weights to lines can affect fish catch rates, and this concern surfaced again during the workshop. NFRDI had placed trained observers onboard longliners using line weighting, and in the coming weeks the data that they collected will be analysed. However, because there are still some concerns, the workshop concluded that additional work is required to achieve a robust sample size to assess possible impacts of line weighting on target catch and on bycatch.

CONTACTS

For additional information, contact:

Mr Alejandro Anganuzzi Global Coordinator for the ABNJ Tuna Project | alejandro.anganuzzi@fao.org