

“Reducing seabird bycatch in European Waters – Challenges & Opportunities”

March 6th | Peniche | Portugal

This workshop was held under the Life Berlengas project (LIFE 13 NAT/PT/000458 – Conserving threatened habitats and species in Ilhas Berlengas SPA through sustainable management) and had as main objectives sharing results among different countries about the latest solutions that are being trialed to mitigate seabird bycatch and promoting debate between national and European administrations on the best way to implement the EU’s seabird Plan of Action.

This summary presents the key themes, ideas and considerations that emerged from the event.

How to mitigate seabird bycatch: technology and innovation

The morning session featured a panel of international speakers who shared some of the work developed to solve the problem of seabird bycatch, all over Europe and also along the coast of Chile. Much of the work developed to mitigate this problem is the result of extensive environmental NGO work, which combines scientific and local knowledge on the real impact of bycatch on seabird populations. BirdLife data point to more than 200 000 seabirds bycaught in specific types of fishing gear every year. For example in Ilhas Berlengas SPA, it is estimated that around 20 000 northern gannets are bycaught every year, mainly in demersal longline. Pete Kibel, from Fishtek illustrated the importance of technological development to produce viable solutions, adapted to each reality.

The exchange of experiences allows increasing the range of solutions to be implemented, and the presence of the Albatross Task Force was extremely relevant in demonstrating one of the solutions being implemented in Chilean purse-seine fleet – a net modification in different sections avoiding the bird’s entanglement and reducing seabird bycatch in more than 90%.

The importance of close collaboration with fishermen and their engagement in the implementation of mitigation measures was repeatedly highlighted.

The future - how do we tackle the problem

The afternoon session started with a communication from Elisa Roller (DG Mare, European Commission) who gave an important summary of the next steps on the implementation of the New Technical Measures Regulation: by 2022 mitigation measures will have to be implemented, being that by 2020 member states will need to propose mitigation measures for their own sea basins, which will be then assessed by a scientific commission (STCF).

Then, followed a BirdLife International communication which identified concrete actions that have to be addressed to tackle seabird bycatch in Portugal, namely the implementation of a scientific observer program, stronger fishing control and a scientific research program to test solutions.

The communications can be downloaded [here](#).

The afternoon panel also included a roundtable with representatives of [IPMA](#), [DGRM](#) and [ICNF](#) who gave a short presentation on seabird bycatch problem context, their institutions role on

monitoring and tackling this threat and their vision on the best ways to solve the problem, followed by a participated debate. Here are the key themes, ideas and considerations that emerged from the debate:

Scientific evidence:

- Currently there is quite more evidence concerning the seabird bycatch problem but there are still some gaps and challenges to overcome with respect to estimate bycatch impact on seabird populations (heavily influenced by the scarcity of data for small scale fishing fleet);
- We need to increase the effort for systematic data collection and data reporting;
- IPMA national programme of data collection, namely under the EU data collection framework, includes bycatch data but it needs improvement in coverage and protocols adopted. This could be achieved by training IPMA observers on seabird Identification through collaboration with SPEA;
- Fishermen input on data collection is an identified priority. This could be materialized by encouraging fishers to fill the new electronic logbook (dpe+) which includes data on bycatch (MAR - birds, mammals and reptiles). This needs specific training actions;
- We need to develop more trials to assess the best possible solutions for reducing and where possible eliminate bycatch;

Funding:

- It was not unanimous whether the existing funds under the national EMFF (Mar2020) are being adequately used to solve the bycatch problem;
- About the funding under Mar2020, it was mentioned the complexity of the applications and as well the recent decision on transferring funds from Priority Union 1 to Priority Union 2 and 5, reducing engagement on fisheries sustainability.
- EMFF funding is not enough (EMFF post 2020 is still an unknown).

Governance and Regulation:

- We need better and stronger regulation in order to support the implementation of mitigation measures;
- When mitigation measures don't work, we should consider spatial and temporal measures as an alternative;
- It is vital to reinforce control and to capacitate human resources (e.g. inspectors training);
- Working closely with fishermen is crucial to tackle the problem;
- There are strong limitations of human and technical resources at the administration level to deal with this problem;
- It is not clear for everyone if the way forward should be through national action plans or rather through concrete actions;

- It is central to increase the level of awareness about this issue not only with the fishing sector but also with the national administration, including senior managers.
- In Portugal, tackling bycatch is still not a priority and there's a lack of national coordination. Workshop participants welcomed the establishment of a working group on bycatch involving government agencies, NGO, research institutions and fishing representatives;