Reducing bycatch of seabirds and sea turtles

Seabirds and sea turtles are amongst the most ‘international’ of all animals, spending significant periods of their lives in the high seas, the areas of the seas that are beyond national jurisdiction.

The incidental capture, or bycatch, of seabirds and turtles in commercial fisheries is widely considered to be their most significant threat. In West Africa, level 1 Ecological Risk Assessments were conducted for seabirds and turtles, which indicated sufficient cause for concern for several seabird species and all turtle species occurring in the region, from trawl and longline fishing operations.

Not all seabirds or turtles are equally at risk of bycatch, nor is that risk the same for all types of fishing. So far no studies of seabird bycatch rates from fisheries within the region, and few for turtles are available.

Therefore, conservation of these highly migratory species with slow reproductive rates and highly threatened marine megafauna from at-sea threats requires concerted, multi-lateral efforts.

“Understanding where, when and how bycatch occurs is, in itself, crucial. But change can only be expected if there are appropriate legal mechanisms (laws, fishery regulations, permit conditions, etc.) in place.”

Marie Madeleine GOMEZ, Manager for the West Africa Programme of MAVA

FISHERIES WITH BIGGEST IMPACT
Trawl and longline fishery

WHERE ARE OUR GEOGRAPHICAL INTERVENTION AREAS
Our partners will focus their efforts at regional and local level (pilot sites to be determined later) in particular on dismursal trawl and longline fishing operations.

THREATENED SPECIES
Sea turtles and seabirds
HOW WE THINK CHANGE WILL HAPPEN

The strategies and their key results - also called "result chains" in technical terms, were defined according to the Open Standards for practice of conservation. A summary is presented below.

1. Improving Scientific knowledge base (Research & data)

2. Mitigation of bycatch

3. Capacity building & awareness

4. National and international policy and advocacy

Knowledge is generated on which fleets, gear-types 1 areas have most impactful seabird bycatch

Best practice bycatch mitigation measures are demonstrated in key fleets

Seabird bycatch mitigation measures are used in national and high seas waters

Observers & national scientists trained to collect, manage and analyse effort and bycatch data

National legislation & regulations are established & ensure Best Practice is mandatory

WE AIM TO:
Reduce bycatch of seabirds and sea turtles in longline and trawl fisheries

HOW THE ACTION PLAN IS BEING IMPLEMENTED

The implementation of this action plan will be led by BirdLife International. Bli will also lead on the at-sea work, potentially in collaboration with other NGOs for turtle-specific actions. Bli will also lead on international policy advocacy work for strengthening and improving fishing access agreements between EU and West African states.

Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD) will be involved in implementing training through research activities with local students. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) will lead mainly on turtle bycatch by providing technical training and oversight for gear modification, as well as in providing technical support for observer and Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) training.

PRCM will assume a strong leadership role in delivering many cross-cutting elements of this programme, including national policy advocacy, reviews of legal instruments and national legislative / permitting procedures, etc.

CSRP will play a crucial role in the process of adapting policy and legal mechanisms, to ensure seabird and turtle bycatch mitigation strategies are adopted across fisheries at the regional level.

All this work will be undertaken in close collaboration with national fisheries authorities.

MAIN PARTNERS

NATIONAL FISHERIES AUTHORITIES IN WEST AFRICA

ANNUAL BUDGET

The annual budget of the action plan has been estimated at € 1'125'000. MAVA will allocate an annual budget of € 920'000, and co-funding still has to be sought.

Total budget € 1'125'000

MAVA allocation € 920'000

LINKS WITH OTHER MAVA ACTION PLANS

WA1 Sea turtles breeding sites
WA2 Breeding & wintering shorebirds
WA3 Seabirds breeding colonies
WA4 Oil & gas pollution

M7: Human-induced direct mortality of priority species has been minimised or eliminated

Marie Madeleine GOMEZ, mariemadeleine.gomez@fondationmava.org