

Action Statement

Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988

No. 181

Nine Threatened Seabirds:

Buller's Albatross

Thalassarche bulleri

Grey-headed Albatross

Thalassarche chrysostoma

Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross

Thalassarche carteri

Light-mantled Albatross

Phoebastria palpebrata

Northern Giant-Petrel

Macronectes halli

Sooty Albatross

Phoebastria fusca

Southern Giant-Petrel

Macronectes giganteus

Southern Royal Albatross

Diomedea epomophora

Wandering Albatross

Diomedea exulans

Description and distribution

The listed taxa covered by this action statement are generally larger migratory seabirds that spend most of their lives roaming the oceans in search of prey. They regularly undertake foraging journeys covering several thousand kilometres of ocean and generally only return to the land for breeding (Walker *et al.* 1995). Twenty-two species of albatross and both giant-petrel species occur in the southern hemisphere and eighteen of these are known to occur in Australian waters.

Habitat

Most of these species spend more than 95% of their time travelling across the world's Southern Oceans in search of prey (Environment Australia 2001) and usually only return to land to breed. Nesting generally occurs on small, remote islands in the Southern Oceans. The following islands used for nesting are in the Australian Fishing Zone and include; Albatross Island, The Mewstone, Pedra Branca and Macquarie Island (including Bishop and Clerk Islets) around Tasmania and several islands within the Australian Antarctic Territory (including Frazier Island, Hawker Island, Giganteus Island, Heard Island and McDonald Island).

Life History and ecology

Albatrosses and giant petrels experience a low natural mortality level and can be extremely long-lived with some individuals known to live for more than 60 years. Most achieve sexual maturity at only 5-12 years of age and while some species breed annually, others breed only every second or third year. Depending on the species, only one chick may be produced. They generally mate for life or until the death of an individual, which may result in the death of the dependent offspring (Croxall *et al.* 1990). This reproductive strategy results in low levels of recruitment, leaving their survival potentially vulnerable to increases in natural mortality.

Decline and threats

Throughout all stages of their life history, albatrosses and giant-petrels are subject to an array of threats, both at sea and on land, that have the potential to reduce their survivorship and/or their capacity to reproduce successfully. The main sea and land-based threats are described below.

- The principal sea-based threat is longline fishing (Gales 1998).
- The principal land-based threat to many albatross and giant petrel populations is predation by introduced mammals such as cats, rats and dogs in breeding colonies or in foraging areas (Jouventin & Weimerskirch 1991). This threat has brought about local extinctions or reductions in numerous populations of large seabirds (Moors & Atkinson 1984). Albatrosses and giant petrels are especially vulnerable as they build nests on the ground, which they leave unattended during long-range foraging bouts, have few predator defences and have a low annual productivity. In addition, introduced species such as rabbits, cattle and sheep may trample nests, overgraze vegetation and modify habitat required for nesting (Environment Australia 2001; Robertson & Bell 1984).
- In combination, these factors are putting the long-term viability of these seabirds at risk. To a lesser extent, the threats outlined below are also considered to have an impact on seabird populations. As most of these factors influence breeding colonies and foraging individuals far offshore from the Australian mainland, they are generally addressed in international or national arrangements. The threats include:
- *competition with fisheries for food resources* - over-exploitation of fish resources has implications for the marine ecosystem and in particular for the higher order predators such as albatross and giant-petrels (Environment Australia 2001).
- *avian parasites and diseases* - breeding success may be reduced through natural agents, such as high parasite load or disease such as avian pox virus which has had a significant impact on Shy albatross. These are generally spread within breeding colonies.
- *incidental catch during trawling and trolling operations* - while few reports are available of seabird interactions with trawl and troll operations, the potential for entanglement with trawl apparatus, nets or troll hooks does exist. The level of any potential impact remains unqualified (Environment Australia 2001).
- *intentional shooting* - seabirds are sometimes shot for sport or to reduce scavenging from recreational and commercial fisheries (Brothers *et al.* 1998). No reports have been received of such action in Victorian waters.
- *marine pollution* - seabirds can be tangled in discarded fishing gear and other materials and can be significantly effected by fuel and oil spills. Chemical contaminants that persist in the environment also bio-accumulate in top

order predators such as the listed species and effect reproductive success.

The greatest threats to these taxa from both land and sea are considered to occur on the high seas and in waters surrounding breeding colonies including those in the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone (up to 200 nautical miles from Australian land). These species spend most of their lives foraging far offshore and nest on islands in the southern ocean, great distances from the Australian continent and from any State managed waters. The Commonwealth Government therefore generally manages threats to these species in Australian waters and released a Recovery Plan for Albatrosses and Giant-petrels in 2001 to minimise risks to populations. The Commonwealth is also involved in international efforts to ensure the conservation of the species.

Threats posed to these taxa in Victorian territorial waters are considered to be minimal as relatively few individuals of the listed species are encountered in this region. This action statement therefore focuses on supporting national and international approaches to ensure that these seabirds are not threatened by human activity.

Conservation status

See Table 1 for the conservation status at an international, national and State level. (Page 7).

Internationally, the taxa covered by this action statement are generally listed as 'vulnerable' on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species (IUCN 2000).

In Australia, all migratory seabirds are protected under the Commonwealth **Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999**.

In Victoria, the taxa covered by this action statement are listed under the **Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988** as 'threatened fauna'. In its final recommendation the Scientific Advisory Committee determined that the nominations satisfied at least one criterion for listing (see the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Regulations 2001 for the detail listing criteria). The above pelagic seabirds are individually listed (SAC 1999; 2000a, b; 2002a, b, c, d, e, f).

This listing complements the listing for the Incidental catch (or by-catch) of seabirds during longline fishing operations as a 'potentially threatening process' under the **Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988** (SAC 1998).

Previous Management Action

Since the 1980s, international agreements have been put in place to minimise impacts on seabird populations.

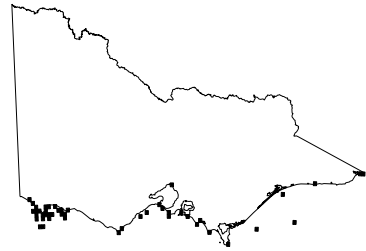
Distribution maps of the nine species for Victorian waters:



Buller's Albatross



Grey-headed Albatross



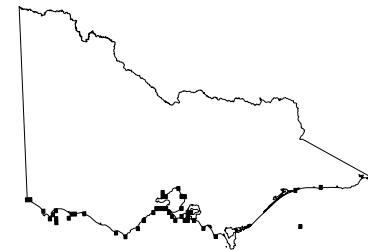
Yellow-nosed Albatross



Light-mantled Albatross



Northern Giant-Petrel



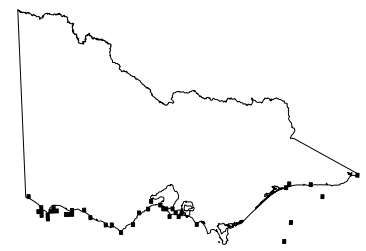
Southern Giant-Petrel



Sooty Albatross



Southern Royal Albatross



Wandering Albatross

Table 1 - Conservation status

The table below identifies the conservation status at an international, national and State level.

Common name	International	Australia (EPBC Act)	Victoria (FFG Act)
Light-mantled Albatross	Near Threatened	Data Deficient	Threatened
Buller's Albatross	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Threatened
Southern Royal Albatross	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Threatened
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Threatened
Wandering Albatross	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Threatened
Grey-headed Albatross	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Threatened
Northern Giant-Petrel	Near Threatened	(not listed)	Threatened
Southern Giant-Petrel	Vulnerable	(not listed)	Threatened
Sooty Albatross	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Threatened

In Australia, these agreements have been incorporated into domestic arrangements and are outlined below.

International Arrangements

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is an international treaty signed in 1982 to protect and preserve the marine environment. This Convention principally related to fisheries and the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 49/118 called upon States (sovereign nations) to take into consideration the effects on associated or dependent species when establishing conservation and management measures for target fisheries. As a result of this resolution, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation developed a Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries to address fisheries by-catch in 1995.

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, under the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, this agreement was opened for signature on June 2001. The main aim of this agreement is to establish a cooperative and comprehensive framework and process to restore albatrosses and petrels to a favourable conservation status. The agreement aims to stop or reverse population declines by coordinating action to mitigate known threats to albatross and petrel populations. Because seabirds have broad ranges and are often migratory, co-operative international action is required and therefore this agreement requires ratification from at least five countries to come into effect. To May 2003, only Australia and New Zealand have done so.

Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources came into force in 1982 with the aim of conserving marine life in the Antarctic region. The ecosystem approach used in the convention seeks to avoid situations in which fisheries have a significant adverse impact on dependent and related species and specific measures apply to avoid seabird bycatch.

International Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries -an internationally endorsed plan which aims to manage compliance issues related to the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and was endorsed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation Council in 2000. All signatories are now required to develop a National Plan of Action to implement international objectives into local management arrangements.

National Arrangements

National Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries is currently being jointly finalised by the Commonwealth, States and Northern Territory and aims to implement local management arrangements that reflect international objectives.

Recovery Plan for Albatrosses and Giant-Petrels (Environment Australia 2001) was released after the listed taxa were included on the threatened species list under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999. The overall objective of the Recovery Plan is to "minimise (or eliminate) threats due to human activity to albatrosses and giant-petrels to ensure their recovery in the wild". The plan provides the framework for actions necessary

to support the recovery of these species and to maximise their chances of long-term survival. The Plan acknowledges the central role of the Longline Fishing Threat Abatement Plan (described below) in eliminating the principal threat to albatrosses and giant-petrels while foraging within Commonwealth waters. Accordingly, this Recovery Plan identifies all other processes that are affecting albatrosses and giant-petrels, and prescribes the necessary management and research actions required to ensure their recovery.

Threat Abatement Plan for the Incidental Catch (or by-catch) of Seabirds during Oceanic Longline Fishing Operations (Environment Australia 1998) was released after this was listed as a key threatening process under the *Endangered Species Protection Act 1992* on July 1995. The plan provides the framework for coordinating national action to reduce the impact of longline fishing activities on seabirds in Australian waters. The Plan now has statutory status through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

National Policy on Fisheries By-catch (AFFA 1999) was released after all Australian Governments agreed to develop a by-catch policy to address by-catch in all fisheries. By-catch arrangements are being incorporated into Fishery Management Plans for each Victorian managed fishery. The Commonwealth Government subsequently released the *Commonwealth Policy on Fisheries By-catch*, which requires the development of By-catch Action Plans for all Commonwealth managed fisheries.

Management objectives

Longterm objectives:

That the taxa covered by this action statement can survive, flourish and retain their potential for evolutionary development in the wild.

Objectives of this action statement

1. To support national approaches for minimising impacts on the listed seabird populations in Australian and international waters;
2. To implement where applicable, Victorian arrangements consistent with national approaches to minimise impacts on seabird populations in Victorian waters.

Intended Management Action

It is recognised that the threats to the nine taxa listed in this action statement, including oceanic longline fishing methods are principally an international and national issue. As management of land-based impacts rest with the particular country of residence, it is recognised that

international and national cooperation is necessary to ensure their long-term survival.

It is also recognised that the main sea-based and land-based threats are generally well beyond Victorian territorial waters and are managed by the Commonwealth through the *Threat Abatement Plan for the Incidental Catch (or by-catch) of Seabirds during Oceanic Longline Fishing Operations* and the *Recovery Plan for Albatrosses and Giant-Petrels*. The management actions are therefore intended to support and be consistent with, international and national developments to protect these species.

1. Encourage recreational and commercial fishers to report interactions with seabirds in Victorian territorial waters.

Responsibility: DPI

2. Support national approaches to minimise threats to the listed taxa as specified in the *Recovery Plan for Albatross and Giant-Petrels*.

Responsibility: DPI, DSE

3. Support the Commonwealth's participation in international fora for pursuing global recovery and sustainability of the listed species.

Responsibility: DPI, DSE

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SAC (1999) Final Recommendation on a nomination for listing: Sooty Albatross *Phoebastria fusca* (Nomination no. 442). Scientific Advisory Committee, Flora and Fauna Guarantee. Department of Natural Resources and Environment: Melbourne.

SAC (2000a) Final Recommendation on a nomination for listing: Southern Giant-Petrel *Macronectes giganteus* (Nomination no. 501). Scientific Advisory Committee, Flora and Fauna Guarantee. Department of Natural Resources and Environment: Melbourne.

SAC (2000b) Final Recommendation on a nomination for listing: Northern Giant-Petrel *Macronectes halli* (Nomination no. 502). Scientific Advisory Committee, Flora and Fauna Guarantee. Department of Natural Resources and Environment: Melbourne.

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Further information can be obtained from Department of Sustainability and Environment Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

Flora and Fauna Guarantee Action Statements are available from the Department of Sustainability and Environment website: <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au>

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