

# Albatross Mortality in West Coast Hook-and-Line Fisheries for Groundfish



Black-footed Albatross

A recent analysis of data from the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program indicates that black-footed albatrosses are being incidentally killed in the West Coast longline fisheries (NWFSC 2008). Black-footed albatross are being considered for listing

under ESA. A determination of their status is expected by the end of this year (2008).

Incidental fisheries mortality is considered one of the primary threats to albatross and petrel populations worldwide. Albatrosses and other seabirds aggregate at vessels feeding on discarded offal and baits and attack baited hooks while fishing gear is deployed. Birds can become hooked and drown as the fishing gear sinks.

In response to black-footed albatross interactions with the West Coast longline fishery, the Fishing Vessel Owner's Association has instructed its members to use streamer lines, in conformance with Alaska seabird

avoidance requirements, when longline fishing in Washington, Oregon and California waters. A streamer line (tori line) is a line that extends from a high point on the vessel to a towed object that creates an aerial section of the line from which brightly colored streamers are suspended. Streamer lines are deployed individually or in pairs while deploying longlines. Although there are no regulatory requirement for West Coast hook-and-line fishers to use bird-scaring devices, voluntary use of streamer lines is strongly encouraged.

The incidental mortality of seabirds has been an important issue in Alaska longline fisheries since the mid 1990's. Provisions of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) limit the take of the endangered short-tailed albatross to two birds in two years in the Pacific halibut fishery and four birds in two years in the groundfish longline fisheries. By using



Short-tailed Albatross

over



streamer lines, Alaska fishermen have reduced their rate of seabird bycatch by nearly 80 percent, and no short-tailed albatross deaths have been observed in 10 years.

Recognizing that the distribution of short-tailed albatross also overlaps the West Coast fishing grounds, NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initiated a process under the ESA to evaluate and minimize the effect of West Coast groundfish fisheries on this species. New regulations to minimize seabird mortality in West Coast fisheries could emerge from this process.

Washington Sea Grant is currently working with NOAA Fisheries to characterize West Coast hook-and-line fisheries and assess the potential for interactions with albatrosses and other seabirds. This analysis will include:

- Mapping albatross and other seabird distributions with the distributions of fishing effort to identify areas of potential seabird-fisheries interaction;
- Describing the vessels in the fleet (length, rigging, gear type...etc);
- Recommending seabird avoidance measures in consultation with the fishing industry;
- Conducting seabird avoidance workshops in West Coast ports.

Washington Sea Grant and NOAA Fisheries are also working to make streamer lines available free of charge to the West Coast hook-and-line fleet.

More information on seabird interactions with longline fisheries is available from several sources. Information on Alaska seabird avoidance requirement is available on the NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region webpage: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds.htm>.

A video on seabird avoidance and a flyer on streamer lines construction and use, as well as other related information, is available on the Washington Sea Grant webpage: [www.wsg.washington.edu/mas/resources/seabird.html](http://www.wsg.washington.edu/mas/resources/seabird.html)

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Northwest Fisheries Science Center. Report on the Bycatch of Marine Mammals and Seabirds by the US West Coast Groundfish Fleet. June 2008. Available at: [www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/fram/observer/datareport/otherreports/full\\_mmsb\\_report072308.pdf](http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/fram/observer/datareport/otherreports/full_mmsb_report072308.pdf)



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