

Western Pacific Regional Fishery
Management Council

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**WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL HOLDS FIRST
EVER BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS POPULATION DYNAMIC WORKSHOP IN
HONOLULU, HAWAII, 8-10 OCTOBER 1998**

HONOLULU, HAWAII -- The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council held a workshop between 8-10 October 1998 to evaluate the effects of fishery-induced mortalities on the Black-footed Albatross population in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. World experts on seabird ecology, population modeling and fishery/seabird interactions, attended the three-day workshop. The workshop was chaired by Dr. John Cooper of the University of Cape Town (S. Africa), who is also a member of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) technical working group on seabird-fishery interactions.

Albatrosses are caught on longlines when they dive on baited hooks as the lines are being set, becoming hooked or tangled and subsequently drowning. World-wide there are 61,020 and 593,936 breeding pairs of Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses, and both species are caught in approximately equal numbers during longline fishing. This suggests that the Black-footed Albatross population may be more seriously affected by the fishery induced mortality.

A large volume of field data on Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses has been collected over several decades, but the majority of this data has remained unused. The Council decided to hold the workshop to characterize the population biology of the Black-footed Albatross population in order to evaluate its resiliency to the effects of mortality due to interactions with the Hawaii longline fishery.

One of the data sources made available to the invited workshop participants was a database containing bird-banding records from 1938 to present. This was the first time that such a large database has been developed to assess bird-banding records for Northwestern Hawaiian Island seabirds. The Council's database contained 100,877 Black-footed Albatross records and can be readily adapted to store banding records from other seabird species.

During the three-day workshop, the experts investigated the Black-footed Albatross population size, trends and geographic distribution. The largest colonies of these birds in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are found on Laysan Island and Midway Atoll, which together contain over 40,000 breeding pairs. The workshop also considered smaller populations of Black-footed Albatross such as those found on the Japanese Islands of Torishima and Chichijima.

Several recommendations were generated by the workshop participants and will be presented to the Council at its next meeting 1-3 December 1998. These include: finalizing the bird-banding records database, design and implementation of a monitoring program to assess the influence of all sources of albatross mortality as well as longlining, estimation of mortality from other US and foreign longline fisheries in the

Pacific, development of mitigation measures appropriate to the Hawaii fishery to prevent birds being hooked, and to make a similar study on the Laysan albatross. A follow-up workshop will likely be organized for the Second International Albatross Conference, which will be convened in Hawaii in May 2000.

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is made up of 16 members representing American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, the Northern Mariana Islands and various federal agencies, including the Fish & Wildlife Service, the Coast Guard, and the State Department. The Council Chairman is James Cook from Hawaii. Vice Chairs are Aitofele Sunia from American Samoa, Judith Guthertz from Guam, Frank Farm from Hawaii, and Arnold Palacios from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The Council, established in 1977, is one of eight regional fishery management councils authorized by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Western Pacific Fishery Council=s jurisdiction includes all waters within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In general, the Council=s EEZ includes all waters from three to 200 miles offshore around American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, the Northern Mariana Islands, and a number of American-flag islands in the Pacific.