

## Bycatch information consolidated in WCPFC database

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*The bycatch of seabirds, sea turtles and sharks in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) is a concern for the region's tuna and billfish fisheries. One reason for this concern is that public perception of the sustainability of fishing practices can affect the market for tuna and billfish. The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) is responsible for the sustainable management of target and non-target (or bycatch) species in the WCPO. However, information about ways to limit and manage bycatch is found in a variety of sources. The WCPFC has sought to consolidate such information within the Bycatch Mitigation Information System (BMIS), an online database accessible at: <http://bmis.wcpfc.int/index.php>*

The BMIS is different from other bycatch databases in that it focuses on tuna and billfish fisheries in the WCPO (although information in the BMIS is relevant to other oceanic fisheries around the world). Only mitigation methods relevant to longline, purse-seine, pole-and-line, and troll fishing are considered. Similarly, only those methods shown to reduce, or have the potential to reduce, the bycatch of seabirds, sea turtles and sharks, are included.

Literature forms one section of the BMIS. Other sections include mitigation methods, decisions (regulations) and a list of target and bycatch species.

Within BMIS, it is possible to search the citations, abstracts or introductions of over 250 scientific and technical documents. Many of these source documents are journal articles, while others are meeting papers, project reports, fact sheets, or official guidelines, such as those from the WCPFC and organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (e.g. FAO guidelines on reducing sea turtle mortality in fishing operations).

BMIS descriptions of mitigation methods summarise the latest knowledge on bycatch and bycatch reduction methods. For example, there is a discussion on circle hooks and their affect on turtle and shark species. Similarly, there is a review of research on fish aggregating device (FAD) management, such as building an ecological FAD that fishes as well as other designs, and the possibility of enticing sharks away from a FAD prior to closing a purse seine.

The BMIS also houses links to WCPFC decisions (e.g. resolutions and conservation and management measures) and those of other tuna regional fisheries management organisations that refer to and/or require the use of particular mitigation methods to protect seabirds, sea turtles or sharks.

It is also possible to search a list of target and bycatch species recorded in the WCPO Observer Database. Only those species that have been noted as "caught by gear" are included.

BMIS contains links to other websites and documents of interest, such as Birdlife International's seabird bycatch mitigation factsheets, SPC's longline terminal gear identification guide, and FAO's illustrated shark catalogues. A type of web feed has been added, making it possible to follow updates to BMIS and bycatch mitigation news.

There is a wealth of bycatch information available in WCPFC's BMIS. Because the database is still under development, comments on ways to improve the database would be appreciated.

BMIS website home page (<http://bmis.wcpfc.int/index.php>).