

Case Study

Gillnets and guillemots

In Iceland, the MSC assessment process has turned potential conflict into positive collaboration to reduce seabird bycatch.

When the Iceland lumpfish fishery entered MSC assessment in 2013, BirdLife International was quick to respond. The environmental NGO had just published a global review of the impacts on seabirds of gillnet fisheries – which are less well studied than longline and trawl fisheries. This research had shown that Iceland was one of the areas with the highest estimated seabird bycatch in gillnets globally (Žydelis *et al.*, 2013).

BirdLife wanted to make sure that the assessment took the impacts of gillnets on bird populations into account. They also saw an opportunity to engage with a gillnet fishery to find ways to reduce bycatch – as they had previously done successfully with other types of fisheries, such as the MSC certified South Africa hake trawl.

Responding to the draft assessment report, BirdLife, through its Icelandic partner Fuglavernd, highlighted discrepancies between external information on seabird bycatch in gillnet fisheries and the level reported by the fishery. While the assessment focused on eider duck – a commercially important species – BirdLife felt that bycatch of other species was being overlooked. They also felt that data were potentially out of date.

As a result of BirdLife's submission, assessors lowered the scores of three performance indicators and introduced a

condition, requiring the fishery to improve the data it collected on seabird and mammal bycatch, so that the risks that the fishery posed to non-target species could be monitored and if necessary mitigated.

The process provided an opening for BirdLife to work with the fishery, and to secure funding to establish a seabird monitoring programme in the Icelandic fleet. They approached Landssamband smabataeigenda, the association that represents Iceland lumpfish fishers, who were keen to collaborate and asked their members to allow seabird observers on their vessels.

In 2015, observers joined 12 fishing trips, recording fishing activity and any bycatch of seabirds or other marine life. The fishing fleet has made observers welcome, and is very positive about the initiative. A further 30 trips, covering a wider area and a longer time period to allow for seasonal changes in bird populations, will be carried out in 2016.

Once bycatch levels are established, BirdLife hopes to work with the lumpfish fleet to develop avoidance measures. Ideas that BirdLife are trialling elsewhere include high-visibility panels that alert birds to the presence of gillnets, and LED lights clipped along the headline of the gillnet to deter birds. Trials of both devices show promise. Bycatch has been reduced with no detrimental effect on fish catch.

‘For BirdLife, the stakeholder engagement process has been vital. In both Iceland and South Africa, we’ve found fisheries very amenable to improving their information and management processes when impacts have been identified. The connections initiated through the MSC assessment have often opened up conversations about other topics, and enabled us to establish long term collaborations.’

**Rory Crawford, Senior Policy Officer,
BirdLife International Marine Programme**

