Executive Summary

From August 2024 to September 2025, the Taiwan Wild Bird Federation (TWBF) and FCF Co., Ltd., under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) implemented an industry-focused, large-scale port-based outreach (PBO) initiative on seabird bycatch mitigation in the longline tuna fleet. TWBF had previously conducted similar outreach work in Mauritius (2016 and 2018), which provided valuable technical background and field experience that, alongside support from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), informed the design and delivery of this new industry collaboration.

The initiative engaged 59 vessels through 37 port visits in Taiwan, Mauritius, and South Africa. It aimed to gather qualitative information on seabird mitigation practices, build technical understanding among industry partners, and strengthen the foundation for collaboration between the fishing industry and conservation organizations.

Findings from the outreach indicate general awareness of seabird bycatch risks among vessel operators, but also variation in the reported use and configuration of mitigation measures. As all information was self-reported and not independently verified, the results should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative of the wider fleet.

The project highlights the need for improved verification and transparency to ensure effective implementation of seabird bycatch mitigation. Expanding at-sea monitoring (e.g., human observers, electronic monitoring, and other independent verification systems), together with continued training and coordination among government, industry, and NGOs, are essential to achieving measurable and lasting progress in seabird conservation across Taiwan’s distant-water fisheries.

Port-Based Outreach on Seabird Bycatch Mitigation: 2024–2025 Collaborative Report

Prepared by the Taiwan Wild Bird Federation (TWBF) and FCF Co., Ltd., with support from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Introduction

From August 2024 to September 2025, the Taiwan Wild Bird Federation (TWBF) and FCF Co., Ltd. implemented an industry-focused, large-scale port-based outreach (PBO) initiative on seabird bycatch mitigation in Taiwan's longline tuna fleet, under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two organizations. TWBF's prior experience conducting PBO activities in Mauritius (2016 and 2018), alongside support from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), provided technical grounding and practical insight for the approach taken in this collaboration.

The initiative aimed to gather qualitative information on existing vessel practices, strengthen technical understanding among industry partners, and establish a foundation for improved conservation measures which are effective and operationally viable within high-risk fishing areas across the Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans.

Officially launched in August 2024, the collaboration built on shared objectives of promoting sustainable fishing practices and protecting marine biodiversity—particularly seabirds vulnerable to longline interactions. The project formed part of FCF's broader efforts to enhance sustainability within its supply chain and advance progress toward Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) and Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification.

This outreach was designed as an educational and capacity-building initiative, representing a proactive step toward fostering dialogue and shared understanding between the fishing industry and conservation organizations.

Scope of Engagement

The initial project goal was to engage with 50 vessels, though the final total was 59 vessels. These were selected based on operational availability and their activity within areas of recognized seabird abundance, regions where mitigation measures are required under Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO) frameworks. Such areas include waters south of 25°S in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, and south of 30°S and north of 23°N in the western Pacific Ocean.

The project involved 37 port visits at locations in Taiwan (9), Mauritius (22), and South Africa (6). The vessels engaged were independent operators within FCF's supply chain but not owned by the company itself. Participation depended on vessel schedules and relevance to the outreach's geographic and ecological focus.

Prior to the interviews, the TWBF trained FCF staff on seabird mitigation techniques and safe release procedures. This training enabled personnel to conduct vessel interviews effectively while integrating seabird conservation awareness into FCF's broader due diligence processes.

Objectives
The outreach had three primary goals: to document self-reported use of seabird bycatch mitigation measures among participating tuna longline vessels; to identify the main challenges and opportunities for improving implementation; and to create a foundation for continued collaboration between industry, government, and civil society on seabird bycatch issues.

Rather than serving as a verification mechanism for seabird bycatch mitigation, this initiative sought to build trust and promote understanding of seabird mitigation practices in a practical, field-based context.

Findings
Captains and crew who participated in the outreach demonstrated a general awareness of seabird bycatch risks and familiarity with mitigation tools such as bird-scaring lines, line weighting, and night setting. However, the reported details of these practices varied widely, and configurations were not always consistent with best-practice recommendations set out under relevant RFMO Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs). The port-based outreach approach permitted discussions on the relative effectiveness of different combinations of conservation and management measures to reduce the impact of fishing activities on seabirds and other taxa. The findings highlighted the ongoing need for clearer technical guidance, continued engagement, and more robust verification of actual practices at sea.

Vessel owners and operators are required to follow domestic license conditions, which in turn must reflect the Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) agreed under the RFMO responsible for regulating fishery operations in each RFMO Convention Area. While these measures provide a common framework, their implementation and enforcement depend on national policies and administrative capacity, which can differ significantly across jurisdictions.

Within Taiwan's longline fleet, observer coverage currently meets or exceeds the minimum 5% threshold required under tuna RFMO standards. However, this coverage is still limited, and provides only a partial view of operational practices and bycatch mitigation performance. Expanding verification mechanisms, particularly through electronic monitoring, would provide a more complete and consistent record of fleet activity and enhance the transparency of conservation outcomes.

All information collected during this outreach was self-reported and not independently verified. In several cases, mitigation tools discussed during interviews were not directly observable on board. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as qualitative insights into awareness, perceptions, and operational challenges, rather than as quantitative measures of compliance or bycatch rates.

Because this project focused on vessels available within FCF's supply chain, the results should not be taken as representative of Taiwan's longline fleet as a whole. Nonetheless, they provided a valuable indication of the practical realities of mitigation implementation and of the importance of improved verification mechanisms to better understand performance at sea.

Recommendations

Strengthening the implementation of seabird bycatch mitigation in the longline sector will require integrating regional policy at the vessel level, training in the practical use of CMMs, and verification through data collection and reporting.

Integrating seabird mitigation requirements into company policies, procurement criteria, and sustainability initiatives can reinforce improvements and promote consistent adoption throughout the supply chain.

Further investment in capacity-building remains important. Developing clearer technical guidance on mitigation measures and deployment procedures could help reduce variability in implementation and support the refinement of Best Practices. Continued training for captains and crew as well as the safe handling of live-caught seabirds can support more consistent and effective practices across fleets.

Expanding independent verification mechanisms is critical, including the increased use of at-sea monitoring (e.g., electronic monitoring systems and increased onboard observer coverage) for more accurate and quantitative assessment of the effectiveness of mitigation practices.

In parallel, strengthened coordination among government agencies, NGOs, and industry stakeholders can ensure that these measures are aligned and mutually reinforcing.

Conclusion

This outreach initiative provided a unique opportunity to engage directly with tuna longline vessel operators to gain first-hand insights into how seabird bycatch mitigation measures are being incorporated onboard. It complements existing RFMO and government monitoring systems by offering a qualitative, field-based perspective on operational realities.

The findings indicate an overall willingness among participating crews to adopt seabird mitigation, alongside significant variability in reported practices and limited verifiable data on implementation. While the existing 5% observer coverage meets RFMO requirements, it offers only a partial picture of fishing operations. Expanding verification mechanisms would enhance transparency, provide more reliable data, and help align conservation objectives with industry practices.

This project represents a foundational step toward more transparent and evidence-based seabird conservation within Taiwan's distant-water fisheries. Continued collaboration among industry, government, and NGOs—supported by strong verification systems—will help translate early progress into measurable and lasting outcomes for seabird conservation at sea.

Appendix: PBO Activity Photos