

WHITE PAPER

From Silent Skies to Seabird-Safe Seas:

How Data-Driven Advocacy Turns Conservation Science into Policy Action

A CASE STUDY: Nómadas x Ngāi Tahu

The Toroa Comeback Campaign — Protecting the Antipodean Albatross Through Data Communication, Storytelling, and International Advocacy

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Executive Summary

The Opportunity for Action

Conservation organizations increasingly hold the science they need to act — GPS tracking, bycatch estimates, population models — but lack the resourcing to turn that science into a campaign a government or an industry cannot ignore. The Antipodean albatross, first known to the indigenous Māori as toroa, illustrates this tension with particular urgency: a taonga (sacred) species in freefall, a signed international agreement with no enforcement teeth, and a handful of named fishing fleets whose practices determine whether the species survives the next two decades.

This white paper documents how Nómadas partnered with Ngāi Tahu — the principal iwi (tribe) of Te Waipounamu, the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand — to translate seabird bycatch science into the Toroa Comeback Campaign, an iwi-led consumer awareness campaign proposal aimed at the US and European supply chains still driving toroa decline. Southern Seabird Solutions advised the campaign's Spain-facing strategy, targeting the swordfish fleet most heavily overlapping with toroa foraging routes. It is a blueprint for what becomes possible when data expertise meets conservation urgency and cultural authority.

50%

Of Global Toroa Population Lost

12%

Ongoing Annual Decline

90%+

Bycatch Reduction Achievable

1B+Viewers Reached via BBC
Frozen Planet II

For conservation leaders, advocacy campaigners, and sustainability officers navigating the gap between having data and having a campaign — this paper explains why partnering with expert external consultants is not just a tactical choice but a strategic imperative.

1. The Antipodean Albatross's Survival Crisis

The Antipodean albatross is one of the great albatrosses of the genus *Diomedea* — among the largest flying birds on Earth, with a wingspan up to 3.3 metres, capable of covering 500 kilometres a day and 5 million kilometres in a lifetime. Some individuals live 70 years. They breed almost nowhere else on the planet but three tiny subantarctic islands south of Aotearoa New Zealand, a UNESCO World Heritage-designated cluster. That geographic narrowness is the species' defining vulnerability: whatever happens to it, happens almost entirely on New Zealand's watch.

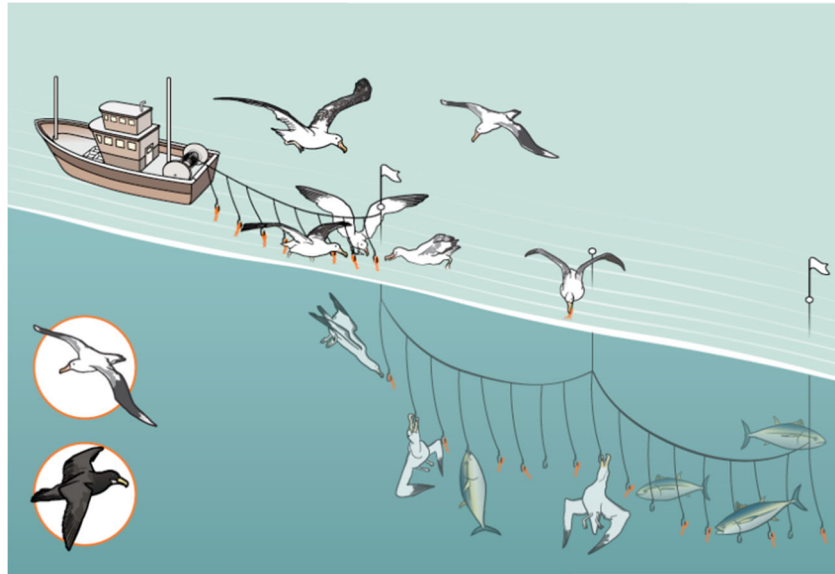
1.1 A Perfect Storm of Pressures

Biological. Antipodean albatross don't begin breeding until age 7 to 20, lay a single egg, take a full year to hatch and raise one chick, and at best manage one chick every two years. It is a life history built for a stable ocean with a near-zero margin for additional adult mortality.

Environmental. Squid, the toroa's primary prey, is growing scarcer in traditional foraging waters under climate change and El Niño/La Niña cycles, pushing birds further from the islands and deeper into water shared with industrial longline fleets.

Commercial. Birds dive at baited longline hooks set for tuna and swordfish, get snagged, and drown. Longline bycatch has been proven to be the direct cause of the decline: 50% of the global toroa/Antipodean Albatross population has already disappeared, and the species continues to decline at a rate of roughly 12% per year.

Regulatory and Awareness. Five mitigation measures already exist and have been demonstrated to reduce seabird bycatch by more than 90%. Efforts targeting the education and action of fishers and governments were already underway and tracked through New Zealand's Department of Conservation (DOC) hui. But this situation has come on rapidly, and awareness has not kept pace — even sustainability certification organizations are lagging behind the science.



1.2 The Data Gap at the Heart of Seabird Conservation

Behind every conservation ambition is a communication challenge. Fishers and governments were already being engaged through formal channels. The general public, retailers, and seafood consumers of tuna and swordfish across the US and Europe — the audiences with the collective purchasing power to change what fishers can sell and where — were largely in the dark.

Most seabird advocacy has historically relied on technical, fisher- and government-facing engagement rather than consumer-facing, supply-chain pressure. This leaves a gap: the actors with the least technical fishing knowledge but the most aggregate purchasing leverage were never given a campaign built for them. Closing that gap required a campaign with its own distinct voice — not a repackaged technical brief, but one led by the community for whom the toroa is a taonga (treasure).

This is precisely the gap that external data communication and campaign expertise is designed to close.

2. Client Profile: Ngāi Tahu

Ngāi Tahu is the principal iwi (tribe) of Te Waipounamu, the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, with mana whenua (territorial rights) status across the majority of the South Island. Ngāi Tahu has held the toroa as a sacred taonga for generations, and advised on the creation of the Toroa Comeback Campaign to ensure the response to the species' collapse carried the iwi's own values, voice, and economic participation — not a borrowed narrative.



2.1 The Toroa's Cultural and Ecological Significance

The toroa was known to Māori long before it was known to Western science. “The human soul is the rare feather of the albatross,” says the whakatauki. Toroa feathers are tapu — sacred — traditionally worn by high-ranking individuals; kākahu (cloaks) for births, weddings, and funerals were woven with toroa feathers; toroa bone was shaped into hooks, spear tips, pendants, flutes, and canoe adornment; and one tukutuku weaving pattern, roimata toroa (albatross tears), is stitched with vertical lines representing misfortune and disaster.

For Ngāi Tahu, the bird's ecological collapse and its cultural erosion are the same emergency, told twice.

2.2 The Challenge: Turning Conservation Science into a Consumer-Facing Campaign

Ngāi Tahu needed a partner capable of:

- Translating bycatch science and DOC-tracked mitigation efforts into a campaign built for consumers, retailers, and grocers, not just fishers and regulators
- Structuring campaign goals, calls-to-action, and partnerships so the iwi's values, view, and voice led every element, with tangible iwi economic benefit built in
- Identifying real partners — grocers, distributors, NGOs, influencers, and brands — with the existing reach and credibility to carry the message
- Bringing in specialist advisory support, including Southern Seabird Solutions, for the campaign's international threads — particularly the strategy aimed at Spain's swordfish fleet
- Doing all of it in a way that honored cultural protocol and kept decision-making authority with Ngāi Tahu, not the consultancy

This is not a project deliverable by an already-stretched volunteer conservation team. It requires a dedicated, expert partner with both campaign strategy depth and the invitation to work inside, not around, cultural authority. That is where Nómadas was engaged.

3. The Nómadas Engagement: What We Built and Why It Worked

3.1 The Mandate

Project Scope

Nómadas was engaged to convert Ngāi Tahu's conservation priorities into two connected deliverables: an internal-facing awareness presentation to build fluency among partners and supporters, and an external-facing consumer awareness campaign proposal to move the US and European supply chain. The engagement spanned research synthesis, cultural collaboration, partnership strategy, and campaign design.

Nómadas drafted the Toroa Comeback Campaign — a consumer awareness campaign proposal — for Ngāi Tahu, alongside “The Plight of the Albatross” awareness presentation. Southern Seabird Solutions advised the campaign's Spain-facing strategy, targeting the swordfish fleet most heavily overlapping with toroa foraging routes.

3.2 How We Delivered

Phase 1 — Open Ears. Nómadas began with cultural and scientific listening: reviewing bycatch research, DOC hui documentation, and existing mitigation science, while working directly with Ngāi Tahu to understand which cultural narratives and protocols needed to anchor every subsequent deliverable.

Phase 2 — Frame the Gap. The core strategic challenge was audience, not data: fishers and governments were already being engaged through DOC-tracked channels, but consumers, retailers, and grocers across the US and Europe — the audiences with the aggregate purchasing power to shift supply chain standards — had no campaign built for them at all.

Phase 3 — Visualize & Translate. Nómadas built “The Plight of the Albatross” presentation, pairing bycatch science with Māori cultural context and reverence for the toroa, so that partner organizations could absorb both the science and the stakes in a single sitting.

Phase 4 — Campaign & Partner. The Toroa Comeback Campaign set goals, calls-to-action, and iwi economic benefits, then mapped a partner landscape spanning Indigenous-led conservation groups, major US grocers (Kroger, Wholefoods), a seafood distributor already ahead on mitigation (Sealord), conservation NGOs (Audubon Society, WWF, Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club), reach-rich creators, and sustainability-forward brands.

Phase 5 — Transfer & Amplify. Nómadas handed off both deliverables with full source materials, defined measures of success (standards changed, content impressions and reshares, traditional media pickup), and timed public-facing messaging to ride the wave of BBC's Frozen Planet II, whose Antipodean albatross segment — narrated by David Attenborough — had just reached over a billion viewers globally, giving the campaign a receptive audience already primed to care.

3.3 The Results

2

Deliverables: Campaign +
Awareness Program

738

Fisheries Impacted by MSC
Certification Update

90%+

Bycatch Reduction from
Proposed Practices

50%

World's tuna catch from MSC-
certified fisheries



- New Certification Update:** In the time since the Nómadas campaigns, the ongoing efforts of all the organizations involved have paid off - the sustainability certification gap is closing. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), which certifies seafood, published the most significant revision in its 25-year history — introducing strengthened, quantifiable bycatch requirements for endangered, threatened, and protected species, including seabirds like the toroa to go gradually into effect through 2030.
- Additional Audience Specificity:** Nómadas moved past fisher- and government-facing outreach to a named ask of consumers, retailers, and grocers across the US and Europe. For campaigns built on subtle, sustained pressure throughout the supply chain, this is the leverage point made real: now consumers and retailers choosing MSC-certified tuna and swordfish can do so with genuine, auditable confidence that bycatch mitigation is a condition of their food's label — not an afterthought.
- Captured Strategic Timing:** Campaign messaging was sequenced to BBC Frozen Planet II's release, converting a passive global audience into a base primed for a specific ask
- Honored Cultural Integrity:** Every deliverable was co-developed with and approved by Ngāi Tahu, preserving the iwi's authority over how the toroa's story is told, and building in direct economic benefit to iwi members

4. The Case for Data-Driven Conservation Advocacy

Conservation organizations pursuing ambitious protection goals frequently underestimate the distance between having data and having a campaign that moves people. The gap is not a question of willpower — it is a question of specialized capability, bandwidth, and objectivity.

4.1 Conservation Teams Are Already at Capacity

Kaitiaki (environment trustees) and conservation groups are typically small relative to their mandate — coordinating with iwi, government agencies, researchers, and international NGOs while also being expected to build data pipelines and design public-facing campaigns. Nómadas provides a dedicated team focused exclusively on the data-to-campaign problem, freeing the client to lead on cultural authority, relationships, and strategy.

4.2 The Cost of Inaction

Material Risks of Under-Specified Advocacy

- Diffuse appeals: General calls to “protect seabirds” are easy for governments and industry to acknowledge without acting on
- Missed accountability windows: Signed government agreements without a public pressure mechanism can stall indefinitely, as seen with the 2021 MOU (Memorandum of Understanding)
- Wasted media moments: Global attention spikes like BBC Frozen Planet II are time-limited; campaigns not ready to meet that attention lose the opportunity
- Cultural erosion alongside biological collapse: Without partners who center indigenous authority, conservation campaigns risk repeating extractive patterns on the very communities most invested in the outcome

4.3 Speed to Value and Cultural Trust

An experienced external partner compresses the time from raw tracking data to a campaign ready to publish. Nómadas' broader work in ESG and sustainability data — including large-scale supply chain traceability engagements — translates directly into faster scoping and better anticipation of what a target audience (government, industry, or public) will actually need to see before it acts. Critically, the engagement was structured so Ngāi Tahu retains full ownership, source files, and authority over the campaign going forward.

6. Broader Lessons: What This Means for Your Organisation

The Nómadas–Ngāi Tahu engagement is not only an albatross story. It is a blueprint for any conservation organisation navigating the transition from awareness to accountability — regardless of species, geography, or cause.

7.1 The Longline Bycatch Challenge Is Fishery-Wide

The Antipodean albatross is not alone in facing longline fishing bycatch — the same five seabird-safe practices (time, waste, weight, discourage, block) that anchor the Toroa Comeback Campaign are directly transferable to other albatross and petrel species, and to other fisheries and flag states, wherever GPS tracking data and fishing-fleet activity can be jointly analysed.

7.2 Storytelling Is the Bridge Between Data and Policy

BBC's Frozen Planet II reached over a billion viewers with a six-minute, David Attenborough-narrated segment on the Antipodean albatross — proof that this story, told well, commands global attention. The lesson for conservation organisations is that data and storytelling are not sequential steps but a single discipline: the overlap analysis is only as useful as the campaign built to carry it, and the campaign is only as credible as the data underneath it.

7.3 International Accountability Will Only Intensify

The 2021 New Zealand–Spain MOU is one bilateral mechanism among a growing set of international seabird and biodiversity commitments. As frameworks proliferate, organisations that can pair conservation science with

named, specific, data-backed advocacy will be positioned to convert commitments into enforced practice faster than those relying on general appeals alone.

8. Conclusion: Follow the Data to Real Impact

The greatest risk facing a species like the toroa is not a shortage of concern — it is a shortage of specificity. Without data granular enough to name a fleet, a fishery, and a flag state, the gap between global sympathy and local accountability will continue to widen.

The Nómadas–Ngāi Tahu engagement demonstrates that this gap is closable. With the right combination of data analysis, cultural partnership, and campaign timing, a species-level extinction crisis can be converted into a specific, actionable, and culturally grounded ask.

25,000 birds. Three islands. Three named vessel flag states. One campaign built to meet a billion-person audience at exactly the right moment. This is what it looks like when data follows impact.

Ready to Turn Your Conservation Data Into a Campaign?

Whether you are sitting on tracking data with no audience, an awareness program with no advocacy ask, or simply trying to understand what your existing data is actually telling you — Nómadas can help.

We offer a complimentary initial consultation to explore your data landscape and identify where external expertise can create the most immediate value.

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Sources & References

Primary Sources

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