CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties

Buenos Aires (Argentina), 22 April to 3 May 1985

Consideration of Proposals for Amendment of Appendices I and II

Proposals Submitted Pursuant to Resolution on Ranching

UPDATED INFORMATION ON CONSERVATION OF SEA TURLES AND RANCHING OF GREEN TURTLES IN SURINAME

I Introduction

In this paper updated information is provided on the ranching proposal of Suriname (see document Doc. 5.44).

II History

In 1964 some sea turtle surveys were done along the coast in the north-eastern part of Suriname (Galibi, Wia Wia). In 1967 scientific research started which resulted in the publication of: J.P. Schulz, 1975. Sea Turtles Nesting In Surinam, Surinam Forest Service. After some rearing experiments in 1970 with green turtles (Chelonia mydas mydas) Suriname started with the Suriname Turtle Ranch in 1977 at Matapica Beach.

III Sea Turtle Conservation and Ranching

The ranching of sea turtles in Suriname was a natural and planned consequence of sea turtle conservation in Suriname. After beginning in 1967 to control the beaches to reduce poaching, to count nests, to replace doomed nests and to undertake other scientific activities, Suriname began a carefully controlled exploitation of the sea turtles for STINASU (Foundation for Nature Preservation in Suriname), a semi-governmental authority responsible to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy.

The operation has two parts: in one part, eggs are collected by the Amerindians in a controlled harvest, and sold locally for the economic benefit of these Amerindians. In the second part, a small portion of the collected eggs is used in the ranching operation. The economic benefits of these operations provide continued support and motivation for the conservation programme.

Present Sea Turtle Conservation Activities

The following conservation activities are carried out in Suriname:

1. Control of the beaches to prevent poaching of eggs.

2. The counting of all nests during the season.

3. Eggs which are laid beneath the high tide level are saved, e.g. removed and reburied on higher spots. This is specially important for the big and heavy leatherbacks (Dermochelys coriacea) which cannot climb high enough on the beach.

The Goals of Ranching

The goals of our ranching project are as follows:

a. Nature conservation and scientific research:

   Raising turtles to 1, 2 and 3 years of age, and releasing of a part of them to increase the chance for survival.

b. Tagging, to show the migration pattern and the age at maturity.

c. Products of a part of the animals raised and reared in captivity can be sold on international markets.

d. Social and educational aspects.

   The project provides employment and recreational opportunities, both for the local population and through tourism. The aesthetic and educational aspects of sea turtle conservation are enhanced by travel to the ranch.

   Thus, the activities on the beaches provide funds for continuation of the above mentioned conservation project.

IV Ranching Activities and Issues in 1984

Annually 15,000 green turtle eggs, the majority being the so-called doomed eggs, are taken to be hatched for the ranching project. This is less than 1.5 percent of the total number of green turtle eggs laid. In 1984, however, no eggs were collected from the wild due to lack of turtle chow.

In 1984 approximately 225,000 green sea turtle and 175,000 leatherback eggs were collected and sold to the public, while 125,000 doomed eggs (906 nests) resp. 105,000 doomed eggs (1224 nests) were saved (see attached table). The income derived from this 1984 sale enable SITNASU to pay a part of the needed personnel and equipment to aid in conservation work on all sea turtle species nesting in Suriname.

Headstarting

In 1984 we released more than 2,500 and in 1885 700 green turtles of one and 2 years of age. It has been calculated by sea turtle experts that out of one hunderd eggs, one turtle reaches the age of one year; so 3,200 turtles of one year correspond with 320,000 eggs.

Tag returns have proved that green turtles reared in captivity are able to find the parental population on the feeding grounds. This means that they are not desoriented and that they can stand predation. With their naturally grown brothers and sisters they will be able to reach the nesting grounds. And even in the case they do not return to their original beaches, but to others, they will contribute to the wild population when they will reach maturity.

Food Source Problem

Present foreign currency problem is linked, to a great extent, to the fact that the operation cannot work economically as long as the international markets are closed for ranched products.

After approval of the Suriname ranching proposal, Suriname will be able to earn foreign currency for the purchase of the so needed turtle chow. However, Suriname hopes to produce its own turtle chow in the near future as result of recent contacts with a local producer of animal food.

V Situation in CITES

The principle of ranching has been accepted in Resolution Conf. 3.15.

At the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Botswana, the biological aspects of the Suriname proposal were overwhelmingly approved. A further approval was delayed until Suriname had supplied more information on acceptable marking and certification procedures. After a lengthy discussion on the marking problem in general, the CITES Technical Committee (TEC) conditionally approved in 1984, by 31 votes in favour and none against, the marking system presented by Suriname.

The condition was that samples of labels and tags should be supplied prior to the meeting in Buenos Aires. This has been done. In addition, Suriname is willing to collaborate in the development of a uniform marking, certification and enforcement system.

NUMBER OF SEA TURTLES NESTS LAID IN SURINAME

IN THE PERIOD 1967 - 1984, especially for 1984

	YEAR AVERAGE 1967-1975	YEAR AVERAGE 1976-1984	1984				
			YEAR TOTAL (%)	NESTS SOLD (%)	"DOOMED" NEST REPLACED (%)	GOOD NESTS NOT REPLACED NOR SOLD (%)	NESTS HATCHED (%)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	6 + 7
C.M.	5116	6114	7546 (100%)	1630 (225,00 eggs) (21.6%)	906 (12%)	5010 (66.4%)	5916 (78.4%)
D.c.	536	3607	7291 (100%)	2059 (175,000 eggs) (28.2%)	1224 (16.8%)	4008 (55%)	5232 (71.8%)
L.o	1721	1033	944 (100%)	0 (0%)	175 (18.5%)	769 (81.5%)	944 (100%)
E.i.	12	21	19 (100%)	0 (0%)	3 (15.8%)	16 (84.2%)	19 (100%)

C.m. = Chelonia mydas, green turtle

D.c. = Dermochelys coriacea, leatherback

L.o. = Lepidochelys olivacea, olive ridley

E.i. = Eretmochelys imbricata, hawksbill