

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

Seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Johannesburg (South Africa), 24 September - 5 October 2016

Species-specific mattersHAWKSBILL TURTLE (*ERETMOCHELYS IMBRICATA*)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Background

2. At its 16th meeting (CoP16, Bangkok, 2013), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decision 16.127 in relation to the hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), which is included in Appendix I with all marine turtles (Cheloniidae), as follows:

Directed to the Secretariat

The CITES Secretariat shall collaborate with the Secretariat of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles. It shall encourage implementation of outstanding recommendations arising from the 2009 regional workshop on the hawksbill turtle in the wider Caribbean and western Atlantic region, taking into account the findings of the status update, as necessary, which shall be completed by 2014. The Secretariat shall report on the implementation of the present Decision at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

3. In 2009, in response to Decision 14.86¹, the CITES Secretariat provided funds to the Secretariat *pro tempore* of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC Secretariat) to convene a meeting about the hawksbill turtle for the wider Caribbean region, with the purpose of promoting collaboration, planning and information sharing within the region, and of improving cooperation with other organizations and multilateral agreements with a mandate concerning the conservation, management and sustainable use of this species in the wider Caribbean.
4. The meeting was held in Puerto Morelos, Mexico, from 23 to 25 September 2009, and attended by 57 participants including representatives of 22 IAC member States. The meeting produced a list of 15 objectives, structured by five main threats, as a regional conservation programme for the hawksbill turtle, including strategies and actions intended to enhance viability of populations and minimize the effects of identified threats. These were as follows:
 - I. Direct take: Targeted Fisheries, Opportunistic Fisheries
 - Objective 1: By the year 2014, reduce by 50% the direct take of hawksbill turtles in the Wider Caribbean and Western Atlantic (WC/WA) Region.
 - II. Gillnet Bycatch and Entanglement in Lost Gear
 - Objective 1: Over the course of 3 years, reduce by 25% the bycatch of hawksbills in WC/WA gillnets
 - Objective 2: Over the course of 3 years, reduce by 50% the volume of lost fishing gear found in coastal (marine) habitat throughout the WC/WA Region

¹ See <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/dec/valid14/E14-Dec.pdf>

III. Habitat Deterioration: Infrastructure, Lights and Vegetation Removal

- Objective 1: 70% of stakeholders in the WC/WA Region have an improved awareness of the threat to hawksbill posed by infrastructure and lights over the next 10 years.
- Objective 2: Change by year 2019 the use of regular lights to “turtle-friendly” lights on 70% of development near or at turtle nesting beaches in the WC/WA Region through the use of incentive measures.
- Objective 3: By year 2014, decrease the impact of coastal development over key sea turtle nesting habitat of the Wider Caribbean Region

IV. Habitat Deterioration: Pollution and Non-Natural Predation

- Objective 1: Reduce solid waste trash on critical hawksbill nesting beaches by 25 % within 5 years to improve fitness, reproductive success and habitat condition.
- Objective 2: Protect critical hawksbill's habitat (nesting and foraging) by reducing impact from oil and chemical spills in the WC/WA Region over the next 10 years
- Objective 3: By 2014, protect hawksbill nesting beaches and improve hatch success by controlling non-native predators.

V. Threats Related to Inadequate Regional Policies and Climate Change

- Objective 1: By 2012, have an ongoing process for the harmonization of conservation and protection efforts for the hawksbill turtle in the WC/WA Region.
- Objective 2: By 2014, have a regional strategy for increased community incentives for conservation.
- Objective 3: By 2020, national climate change adaptation plans are under implementation in all hawksbill range countries of the WC/WA Region.
- Objective 4: By 2020, 20% of identified climate-resilient reef patches/areas at key regional hawksbill foraging grounds are protected in MPA networks.
- Objective 5: By 2020, each of the key regional hawksbill foraging grounds has a management and conservation plan, including mitigation of non-climate stressors.
- Objective 6: By 2020, an adequate sex ratio is produced in each genetic stock in the Wider Caribbean Region to ensure population viability and recovery.
- Objective 7: By 2020, Research community understands the impacts of changes in open ocean conditions on the population viability of hawksbills.

The meeting results were summarized in document CoP15 Doc. 50. The full report of the meeting is available online at: http://www.iacseaturtle.org/eng-docs/publicaciones/Hawksbill_Report_Final_ENG.pdf.

5. Based on the threat analysis and ensuing discussions, the meeting identified four important issues that should immediately be addressed in order to provide prompt and effective conservation actions, and for which some participants were asked to develop project outlines:
 - reduction of by-catch of hawksbill throughout the WC/WA region;
 - reduction of direct take of hawksbill turtles and the trade in their products in the WC/WA region;
 - identification of hawksbill distinct nesting population units in the WC/WA region; and
 - harmonization of laws, regulations, and policies for the conservation of hawksbill turtles *Eretmochelys imbricata* in the wider Caribbean.
6. The meeting also agreed on two follow-up actions, both of which were not pursued further (according to the IAC Secretariat), i.e.:
 - Develop a joint IAC-CITES-Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol (SPA) regional proposal for GEF; and
 - SPAW Secretariat could promote a proposal within the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Programme.

Implementation of Decision 16.127

7. In 2013, in support of the implementation of Decision 16.127, the Secretariat provided funds to the IAC Secretariat to update the information presented in the 2009 meeting report, including revisions of: (i) population data concerning nesting and foraging sites; (ii) threats, including a review of national and international trade; and (iii) the conservation status of the Eastern Pacific population; as well as updated recommendations. This activity was supported by the generous funding of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
8. The IAC Secretariat collated the updates in the study "Conservation Status of Hawksbill Turtles in the Wider Caribbean, Western Atlantic and Eastern Pacific Regions" published in 2014 and available online at: <http://www.iacseaturtle.org/eng-docs/publicaciones/Conservacion-Carey-ing-final.pdf>.
9. This study includes the items specified in paragraph 7 above, and provides an updated list of recommendations and priority conservation actions for the WC/WA, Southwest Atlantic (SWA) and Eastern Pacific (EP) region. The full list and the status of implementation of the recommendations in April 2016 is presented in Annex 1 to the present document. The recommendations that seem most relevant to CITES and that are not immediately addressed by other relevant international fora can be summarized as follows:
 - a) Current status of trade: Concern about the trade in hawksbill turtles is widely expressed, but no recent trade surveys have been conducted to review levels, scope or trends, or to evaluate its impacts. An updated assessment is warranted to determine the extent of trade, and identify areas of concern where immediate mitigation efforts may be needed; and
 - b) Communication and coordination: There is a need to continue communications and coordinated efforts among CITES, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Ramsar Convention, IAC and the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol) in support of the conservation of the hawksbill turtle, and to ensure compatibility of activities, optimize resources and enhance synergies.
10. At the 66th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC66, Geneva, January 2016), the IAC Secretariat, in collaboration with the Secretariat of CMS/Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA), submitted an information document on the illegal take of, and trade in marine turtles (see document [SC66 Inf. 7](#)). The document was based on the information from the 2014 status update report for the IAC regions (see paragraph 8), and an IOSEA report of 2014 on trade in marine turtles in the IOSEA region (see [here](#)). It concludes that all species of marine turtles are at risk from the impacts of illegal take and trade in the regions concerned, while the full extent of these activities remains largely unknown. It also points out that illegal trade in marine turtles is not restricted to the IAC and IOSEA regions.
11. In this context, it is worth noting that, at SC66, the Standing Committee adopted modalities for a new annual report on illegal trade, as communicated to Parties through [Notification to the Parties No. 2016/007](#) of 5 February 2016. The first illegal trade report is due from Parties on 31 October 2017 and should cover data from 2016.
12. The project entitled "Minimizing the Illegal Killing of Elephants and other Endangered Species" (MIKES), which is being implemented by the Secretariat between 2014 and 2018 with the generous funding of the European Union, includes a component to strengthen the monitoring and protection of marine turtles, including hawksbill turtles, at selected sites in the Caribbean and Pacific regions. In the Caribbean, a project has been developed with Cuba's Fisheries Research Centre (CIP), and in the Pacific with The Nature Conservancy in Solomon Islands. These projects should contribute to enhancing the understanding of illegal take of marine turtles in these two countries, and lead to relevant conservation and management actions.

Conclusions

13. The CITES and IAC Secretariats concur that Decision 16.127 has been implemented. As explained in paragraph 6 above, two actions that had been identified at the 2009 workshop for immediate follow-up were not implemented. However, the Secretariats consider that they were superseded by the findings and updated recommendations of the study conducted by the IAC Secretariat in 2014.

14. IAC's study in 2014 resulted in conclusions and recommendations concerning the conservation status of the hawksbill turtle in the WC/WA and EP regions, which are shown in the table in Annex 1 to the present document. The table also indicates all activities that were undertaken to date to address these recommendations. Two important areas that are pertinent to the implementation of the provisions of the Convention for this species are shown in paragraph 9 above. The first is the lack of robust information on trade in hawksbill turtles and related threats to the species, and the high level of uncertainty about the status of the populations in the IAC region. The second area is the need to strengthen information exchange and synergies between CITES and organizations and multilateral agreements that have a mandate concerning the conservation, management and sustainable use of marine turtles throughout their range.
15. The information document collated by IAC and IOSEA (mentioned in paragraph 10 above) further notes that knowledge gaps regarding the status of trade exist throughout the range of the hawksbill turtle and extend to other CITES-listed marine turtle species.

Recommendations

16. The Conference of the Parties is invited to delete Decision 16.127.
17. The Secretariat recommends that the Conference of the Parties consider the adoption of the following draft decisions, based on the findings and conclusions above:

Directed to the Secretariat

- 17.AA The Secretariat shall collaborate with the Secretariat of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC), the Secretariat of the Indian Ocean South East Asia Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (IOSEA) and other relevant organizations and multilateral agreements with mandates relating to the regional and global conservation, management and sustainable use of marine turtles, to:
 - a) subject to external funding, undertake a study on the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles, *inter alia* to research its status, scope and trends, conservation impacts and management options, and to identify areas where immediate mitigation efforts may be needed;
 - b) encourage communication and coordination among CITES, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Ramsar Convention, Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) and the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol) and others agreements, as appropriate, to address relevant recommendations arising from the IAC study "Conservation Status of Hawksbill Turtles in the Wider Caribbean, Western Atlantic and Eastern Pacific Regions", published in 2014, and to ensure compatibility of activities, optimize resources and enhance synergies; and
 - c) report on the implementation of the present decision to the Standing Committee, as appropriate, and to the Conference of the Parties at its the 18th meeting.

Directed to the Standing Committee

- 17.BB The Standing Committee shall review the information and recommendations submitted by the Secretariat in compliance with Decision 17.AA, and formulate its own recommendations as appropriate.

Table: Conclusions and recommendations for hawksbill turtle conservation in the Americas

WC/WA=Wider Caribbean and Western Atlantic, SWA=Southwest Atlantic, EP=Eastern Pacific. Convention acronyms: CITES = Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, CMS = Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species, IAC = Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC), SPAW = Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife.

X denotes the regions for which the specific recommendations are most applicable.

Conclusions/Recommendations	Region			Updated Activities 2016
	WC/WA	SWA	EP	
<p><i>Protection Status – A.</i> Hawksbill mortality could be greatly reduced by improving compliance with existing national regulations, since lack of enforcement continues to be a widespread threat to hawksbills. Bräutigam and Eckert (2006) recommended development and implementation of a compliance strategy for the Wider Caribbean, which is still needed in that region. Strengthening collaborations with local stakeholders is vital to improving compliance. The socio-economic aspects of reduced hawksbill take (primarily for local trade) should be assessed to identify locations/communities where alternative livelihoods and protein sources are needed, which will improve conditions and facilitate compliance. Education and raising awareness will also be an important component of a compliance strategy. In addition, capacity building and training to monitor illegal activities are also needed. Specific locations in the WC/WA where these efforts may have a greater impact on reducing illegal take of hawksbills are Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela. In the EP, El Salvador and Mexico may be among the countries with the most immediate need.</p>	X		X	

<p><i>Protection Status – B.</i> An important knowledge gap is the current status of trade in hawksbill products, particularly trade between countries. Concern for the impact of this threat has been widely expressed; however, no recent assessment has been conducted to determine the severity of this threat currently. The ongoing threat of international trade in hawksbill products is congruous with the need for improving compliance with existing instruments, particularly CITES, under which hawksbills are an Appendix-I species. In light of recent efforts in some countries to curtail trafficking of hawksbill products, an updated assessment is warranted to determine the extent of trade and to identify target areas where immediate mitigation efforts may be needed.</p>	X		<p>X</p> <p>IAC Secretariat presented the recommendations from the 2014 Hawksbill report to the IAC COP7 in 2015. IAC Parties agreed on the need for an updated assessment of the status of trade in hawksbill products, since this threat continues to be present in the region. COP7 report available here (page 13): http://www.iacseaturtle.org/eng-docs/resolucionesCOP7CIT/COP7%20Report%20FINAL_8.28.15.pdf</p> <p>IAC and IOSEA Secretariats jointly presented the information document “Illegal take of and trade in marine turtles “at the 66th CITES Standing Committee meeting.</p>
<p><i>Protection Status – C.</i> Conduct a thorough review of protective legislation and inconsistencies within regions. One area of concern is the need to assess compliance of United Kingdom (UK) overseas territories [British Virgin Islands (BVI), Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands] with CMS where the hawksbill is an Appendix-I species; these territories have no reservations with CMS that would allow the legal take of hawksbills or other sea turtles. Another area of concern is potential lack of compliance with the SPAW Protocol, where party States that continue to allow legal fisheries may be in violation, i.e., BVI, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines.</p>	X		
<p><i>Protection Status – D.</i> Improve protective legislation in countries/territories where take is legal and does not violate agreements such as SPAW and CMS. Efforts are needed to ensure that any legal exploitation is controlled using the principals of sustainability, which include science-based management plans and monitoring take levels and turtle populations.</p>	X		<p>This recommendation was discussed at SPAW Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) and SPAW COP in 2014. Recommendation VI was endorsed by SPAW COP with the following language:</p> <p>“Noting the findings and concerns of the recent study by the IAC on the conservation status of Hawksbill turtles in the Wider Caribbean about the legal take of sea turtles including Hawksbill sea turtles in some countries in the Eastern Caribbean, including some countries that are Party to SPAW Protocol;</p> <p>Recommends that:</p> <p>The SPAW COP remind all SPAW Parties of the requirements of the Protocol and call on Parties that</p>

				are allowing legal take of sea turtles, that this is not in compliance with the Protocol and should either be stopped or allowed only under the criteria for exemptions provided in the Protocol, in which case they should enter into the process of reporting such an exemption to the STAC in order for the STAC to assess its pertinence.
<i>Protection Status – E.</i> Continue communications and coordinated efforts among CITES, CMS, IAC, SPAW Protocol, and Ramsar conventions to share information about the hawksbill in order to identify conservation activities as a team and to capitalize on synergies and optimize resources.	X	X	X	Continued communications between the Secretariats of CITES, SPAW, and IOSEA.
<i>Principal Threats –</i> Conduct a comprehensive, quantitative threats assessment, similar to the assessment conducted by Bolten et al. (2010) for North Atlantic loggerhead turtles.	X		X	
<i>Fisheries By-catch –</i> Need empirical data on fisheries by-catch of hawksbills to better understand the severity of this threat, particularly from small-scale coastal fisheries, which are likely to have the greatest impact on hawksbills (particularly set-net and dive fisheries). Principal target areas for research and implementation of mitigation measures should be identified. Target areas (areas considered to be of particular concern) suggested during the NFWF threat assessment were Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, and Nicaragua, with further investigation recommended for Bahamas, Jamaica, and Panama (NFWF unpubl. data). This is a widespread problem in the EP nearshore and inshore areas, and thus areas of higher known observations may be the most immediate areas for further assessment; e.g. Costa Rica and Mexico.	X	X	X	
<i>Habitat Loss/Degradation –</i> Assess top nesting beaches (see Table 3 for WC/WA, and Table 5 for EP) for specific threats to terrestrial and nearshore habitats and develop mitigation strategies. Of particular concern for some sites is uncontrolled (or unregulated) coastal development on or near nesting beaches and nearshore foraging habitats, as well as impacts from oil exploration and extraction; e.g., in the WC/WA: Barbados, Guadeloupe, Panama, and Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula; and in the EP: Ecuador, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.	X	X	X	

<p><i>Climate Change</i> – Impacts from climate change should be assessed on a regional scale to determine where knowledge and mitigation gaps exist and ensure that standard protocols are being implemented to monitor beach sand temperatures on all index beaches. Protection measures should be taken to preserve natural sex ratios and protect nesting and foraging habitat. There is also a need to better understand synergistic impacts from multiple stressors on sea turtle resilience to changing climate, and to identify and implement mitigation measures for the most vulnerable nesting populations to climate change impacts by RMU.</p>	X	X	X	<p>IAC Scientific Committee has a working group dedicated to follow up on the implementation of IAC Resolution CIT-COP4-2009-R5 on Adaptation of Sea Turtle Habitats to Climate Change. Resolution can be found here: http://www.iacseaturtle.org/eng-docs/resolucionesCOP4CIT/CIT-COP4-2009-R5ENG_Final.pdf</p> <p>In 2015 this working group produced a technical document on mitigation strategies to reduce the impact of climate change on nesting beaches that can be found at this link: http://www.iacseaturtle.org/eng-docs/publicaciones/CIT-CC12-2015-Tec.10_Climate%20change%20parametres_WEB.pdf</p>
<p><i>Research</i> – Studies on hawksbill life history and ecology are still needed, especially for EP hawksbills where little is known. The WC/WA research needs are more varied, with numerous nesting beach studies and to a much lesser extent studies of in-water foraging aggregations. Additional studies are needed on: hawksbill population ecology (e.g. survival and growth rates, especially of the large juvenile/subadult stage); feeding ecology, habitat needs, and their influence on foraging habitats; developmental stages (especially the oceanic phase); movements and migrations; population genetics; and other aspects.</p>	X	X	X	
<p><i>Population Status</i> – More information is needed on long-term population trends on nesting populations and particularly on in-water aggregations. Review and expand, where necessary, monitoring efforts to ensure consistency at index beaches and elsewhere, using Minimum Data Standards (SWOT Scientific Advisory Board 2011), region-wide. Monitoring should include efforts to estimate remigration intervals and clutch frequencies of nesting populations, and changes in condition and abundance of foraging aggregations, which will allow for better assessment of population changes over time.</p>	X	X	X	

<p><i>Habitat Use/Movements – A.</i> Compile and analyse satellite tracking and tag recovery data at a regional level to have a more comprehensive understanding of regional habitat use patterns, identify hotspots, and identify important gaps in protection. These efforts will help identify and provide information on important developmental habitats in nearshore waters, where human interactions are more likely, in order to target areas for conservation assessment and action. One area of particular interest and concern is the foraging habitat off the Caribbean coasts of Honduras and Nicaragua.</p>	X			
<p><i>Habitat Use/Movements – B.</i> Continue efforts to identify and protect critical foraging habitats for hawksbills.</p>	X		X	
<p><i>Habitat Use/Movements – C.</i> Develop and maintain a database for in-water studies on hawksbills in the WC/WA and EP regions to monitor activities across regions and provide a central location for managers, scientists and conservationist to obtain information, similar to what has been done by the state of Florida, US (Eaton et al. 2008). This will facilitate access to information, information exchange, and identification of knowledge gaps for managers, scientists, and others.</p>	X	X	X	

TENTATIVE BUDGET AND SOURCE OF FUNDING
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS OR DECISIONS

According to Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP16) on *Submission of draft resolutions, draft decisions and other documents for meetings of the Conference of the Parties*, the Conference of the Parties decided that any draft resolutions or decisions submitted for consideration at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties that have budgetary and workload implications for the Secretariat or permanent committees must contain or be accompanied by a budget for the work involved and an indication of the source of funding.

The Secretariat proposes the following tentative budget and source of funding:

- A. The proposed study on the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles, proposed in draft decision 17.AA, has an estimated cost of 40,000 USD. The other activities proposed in the draft decision can be covered within existing core funding of the Secretariat.
- B. The implementation of the proposed draft Decisions would be subject to the availability of external funds, which will have to be identified.