



Memorandum of Understanding on the  
Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and  
their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia

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SIXTH MEETING OF THE SIGNATORY STATES  
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## REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

### Recruitment of Signatory States

1. Since the Signatories last met in August 2008, the Memorandum of Understanding has taken effect in another five States of the region: Yemen (1 November 2008), France (1 March 2009), Mozambique (1 March 2009), Maldives (1 July 2010), and Papua New Guinea (1 December 2010). The IOSEA MoU will take effect for the most recent signatory, Malaysia, on 1 December 2011. This brings the total number of States participating in the agreement to 33. After ten years of existence, IOSEA has succeeded in bringing on board almost all of the key coastal States. Only a small number of countries with substantial coastlines bordering the Indian Ocean and adjacent seas have yet to join the MoU. Several of these are beset with ongoing political difficulties which hinder the prospect of membership in the short term. A further three key countries with important fishing interests in the Indian Ocean, as well as marine turtle populations frequenting their waters, have yet to show interest in joining the IOSEA MoU.

### Substantive activities undertaken

2. The following sections briefly summarise some of the activities in which the Secretariat has been engaged over the past three years. The substantive work of the Secretariat has been concentrated in four main areas: development of the proposal for a network of importance for marine turtles; establishment of a new capacity building/technical support programme; creation of new online tools of value to turtle practitioners and managers; and improvements in knowledge management through enhanced national reporting.

3. The content of site network proposal (presented in detail in document MT-IOSEA/SS.6/Doc. 7) was developed intersessionally by the Secretariat and a consultant (Dr. Eric Gilman) engaged for that purpose, in consultation with a working group chaired by the United States as well as members of the Advisory Committee and other experts. The proposal, contained in two working papers, has been considerably focussed and strengthened by this review process, which lasted over a year.

4. The Secretariat developed the concept of a new IOSEA Capacity-building/Technical Support Programme (presented in detail in document MT-IOSEA/SS.6/Doc. 8), and secured a grant for its operation from the United States' Marine Turtle Conservation Fund. The programme was intended to match expertise within the IOSEA Advisory Committee with requests for technical assistance from member countries. While the programme attracted initial interest from a half dozen Signatory States that submitted applications for funding, only two of the proposals were converted into concrete activities and one is still under consideration. The Secretariat made repeated interventions to encourage a number of Signatory States to take advantage of the assistance on offer, but it has proven difficult to identify interested partners. Other options for channelling technical support to member States may be discussed in a separate conference paper on this subject.

5. During the reporting period, the Secretariat introduced and has continued to enhance two new online tools designed to make information on marine turtle conservation available to a wide audience. The IOSEA Satellite Tracking Metadatabase has now grown to include information on over 150 projects in 30 countries of the IOSEA region, which have tracked nearly 900 individual turtles over

the past two decades. A workshop planned for the present meeting will demonstrate the value of this unique resource for determining gaps in coverage and helping to orient future research.

6. The online Bibliography Resource has grown considerably over the past three years to include almost 2000 English, French and Portuguese references relevant to marine turtle conservation (from 1907 to the present). Initially focusing on the Western Indian Ocean, the resource has been greatly expanded to also include hundreds of entries from countries of the Northern Indian Ocean. The extension work carried out in 2010-2011 was undertaken by a consultant (Dr. Jeff Miller) and the Secretariat, and was made possible with funding from the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project. The Bibliography Resource is widely consulted and the Secretariat receives many requests for accessing individual papers, which are accepted only if they meet strict usage guidelines. Consideration may be given to extending the content of the Bibliography Resource to other IOSEA regions if a suitable partner and funding source can be identified.

7. The Online Reporting Facility is an essential element for assessing the state of implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding. Its ability to fulfil that role depends on the quality and timeliness of reporting by member States. Recognizing that Signatory States do not necessarily have access to all sources of information or the capacity to transfer that information to the IOSEA reporting template, the Secretariat initiated two projects in the reporting period to assist countries of the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) and Northern Indian Ocean (NIO) with their national reporting. As a consequence, the national reports of nearly 20 IOSEA Signatory States have been considerably improved with the inclusion of additional references from peer-reviewed literature, as well as the identification of scores of additional geo-referenced sites of importance for marine turtles. The work in the WIO was carried out under the direction of Dr. Ronel Nel (South Africa), while the exercise in the Northern Indian Ocean was conducted by Dr. Jeff Miller and various in-country helpers, within the framework of IOSEA-BOBLME collaboration.

#### *Facilitating information exchange*

8. One of the key functions of the Secretariat is to facilitate the exchange of information about marine turtle conservation activities within and, to a lesser extent, beyond the IOSEA region. Given its limited capacity, the most cost-effective means of disseminating information is via the IOSEA website ([www.ioseaturtles.org](http://www.ioseaturtles.org)). The website has functioned well<sup>1</sup> and has not been substantially redesigned since undergoing a major overhaul in 2008. Two new features added recently include an experimental Twitter feed of updates made to the website as they occur, and an automated Google translation function for several widely used languages. Although the translations are far from perfect, they allow users without any English language capability to get the gist of some of the website content.

9. The monthly 'e-News' service continues to be sent out every month to a fixed subscriber list that now numbers more than 1000 individuals. The monthly newsletter contains a number of features from the previous month, news from the Secretariat, and clickable links to headlines and other stories that readers may have missed if they were not frequent visitors to the website. This service continues to be well received, as evidenced by the increased number of website visits immediately after its circulation at the beginning of the month. There is also a noticeable spike in readership at the beginning of each week, suggesting that there may be a core group of users who visit the site on a weekly basis. The Secretariat is able to track all of these trends through a built-in web traffic analyser. Profiles of the Month and feature articles continued to be published on a regular basis; however attracting regular external content remains a challenge. The Secretariat has also prepared a comprehensive 'Year-End Review and Look-Ahead' in each of the last two years, giving a unique perspective on regional developments.

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<sup>1</sup> In late October 2011, the institution housing the servers that host the IOSEA website was severely impacted by widespread flooding in Thailand. With its rehabilitation expected to take many months, at the time of writing the Secretariat was investigating the potential of recovering/re-establishing the website elsewhere.

10. The Online Projects Database now contains detailed descriptions of nearly 140 project activities in 29 countries around the region. The Secretariat has made a concerted effort to solicit and compile the information from a wide range of sources. Though there are likely many project activities still not included in the system, a very good start has already been made. Future attention should focus on requesting contributors to review and update their entries. The Flipper Tag Series database, which displays information about the flipper tag series used in countries around the IOSEA region, was reformatted in 2010/2011 and has received new information for several countries during the reporting period.

11. The IOSEA Interactive Mapping System (IMaPS), formerly hosted by the UNEP/World Conservation Monitoring Centre, was withdrawn from service during the reporting period, because the once cutting-edge technology had become dated and the server on which it was located was not being actively maintained by WCMC. Although work was done to successfully demonstrate the benefits of transferring the system to a Google Earth platform, a lack of funding and subsequent changes in WCMC personnel meant that the project has been put on hold. This raises the question as to whether new resources should be found to re-launch the system with an improved interface, or whether other options should be explored for presenting the underlying data, which come from a dataset updated periodically by Dr. Colin Limpus.

12. The Secretariat has at its disposal a range of information materials for public distribution, including a DVD “*Sea Turtles – Our Ocean Ambassadors*” produced in English and French, an informative brochure and colourful stickers. However, it is probably time to redesign and update the suite of information materials and/or consider whether alternative approaches might better serve the purpose of communicating the work that IOSEA is conducting.

#### *Inter-agency cooperation and sub-regional coordination*

13. The Secretariat has continued to strengthen its good working relationship with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) – attending IOTC meetings regularly, providing input to resolutions, contributing to status reports, training materials etc. The Coordinator’s active participation in the IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB) has cemented IOSEA’s important role in maintaining a high profile for marine turtle concerns in that regional fisheries management body.

14. The Secretariat continued its long-lasting association with a regional programme that aims to promote marine turtle research and conservation in South-East Asia, effectively coordinated by the Southeast Asia Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), based in Malaysia. The Coordinator has participated actively in several regional SEAFDEC workshops over the years, including one to launch a new phase of the project on “Research and Management of Sea Turtles in Foraging Habitat in the Southeast Asian Waters”.

15. In the Western Indian Ocean, conservation activities have been loosely coordinated through the WIO Marine Turtle Task Force (MTTF), chaired by Dr. Ronel Nel. The Task Force is nominally a joint initiative of IOSEA and the Nairobi Convention, but it has not received operational funding from either body. Coordination activities over the past three years were generally limited to correspondence by email. However, a well-attended marine turtle side-meeting organised in the margins of the biennial WIOMSA symposium, held in Mombasa in October 2011, attracted several MTTF members.

16. During 2010-11, the Secretariat forged a new partnership with the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) project, through which IOSEA has received a small grant to improve the state of knowledge of marine turtle conservation efforts in the eight countries of the BOBLME region, comprising Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

17. In October 2010, the Kuwait-based Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) invited the IOSEA Secretariat to a meeting of ROPME member States, with a

view to seeking IOSEA advice on the establishment of a regional marine turtle conservation programme. The workshop agreed an ambitious schedule for future joint activities, contingent upon ROPME's conclusion of a separate protocol on biodiversity and protected areas (which appears not to have been realised, as of the time of writing).

18. The Secretariat has continued to have cordial contacts with the Secretariat of the Inter-American Sea Turtle Convention (IAC), based in Costa Rica. Although it has not been possible to consider a more formal working relationship with the IAC, the respective secretariats collaborated on inputs to one of several tuna-RFMO meetings, and the exchange of information on organisational practices has been instructive.

19. Although constrained by funding and capacity, the Coordinator has attempted throughout the reporting period to attend marine turtle meetings important for the work of IOSEA. The list included three meetings of the Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology & Conservation, where useful IOSEA side-meetings were organised; as well as several specialised fisheries conferences and scientific/conservation symposia in different parts of the IOSEA region. Relatively few opportunities arose for bilateral or sub-regional consultations with IOSEA member States, but those that did materialise were very enriching (e.g. Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, France/La Réunion, Madagascar, Oman, and United Arab Emirates). The IOSEA Secretariat has not been in a position to participate in the biennial FAO Committee on Fisheries meeting since 2007, and it should probably consider attendance in 2013.

#### **Administrative and financial matters**

20. The IOSEA Secretariat continues to be staffed by one professional officer, about 15 percent of whose time is spent as Senior Advisor to the Convention on Migratory Species, IOSEA's parent organisation. The Coordinator's advisory work on behalf of CMS has generally been in areas far removed from marine turtle conservation; and is more often related to migratory bird conservation in Asia. However, one occasionally finds some parallels and commonality of approaches that are transferrable from one field to another, with potential benefit for IOSEA work.

21. In 2007, an arrangement was successfully negotiated with the United Nations Environment Programme, which administers CMS/IOSEA, whereby about 75% of the overhead charges on contributions normally retained by UNEP headquarters are used to fund a full-time Team Assistant position. The balance of the cost of the post is covered by the IOSEA core budget. This special arrangement has greatly increased the Secretariat's capacity over the past three years.

22. The Secretariat also benefitted during the reporting period from a short-term (voluntary) staff placement from CMS headquarters, an internship sponsored by the Republic of Korea, and other part-time assistance. A well-drafted proposal for a junior professional post in Bangkok has not been identified by UNEP as a priority to pursue; and a proposal for additional staff support was not taken up by CMS at its last COP (Rome, 2008).

23. The Secretariat remains co-located with the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (UNEP/ROAP) in the United Nations building in Bangkok. The administrative arrangements continue to run smoothly and the support received from both UNEP/ROAP and ESCAP in relation to administrative issues has been conducive to a productive work environment. As noted in document MT-IOSEA/SS.6/Doc. 10, the IOSEA Secretariat will be expected to pay for its share of office space in the UNEP/ROAP premises beginning in 2012.

24. Financial and administrative matters are covered in depth in the paper mentioned above, but it is appropriate to mention here the worthwhile investment of Secretariat time in encouraging voluntary contributions towards IOSEA operational costs, as well as the preparation of grants for specific activities. Indeed, the voluntary, non-binding nature of the IOSEA agreement requires expenditure of effort to pursue contributions that might otherwise be more readily forthcoming through a binding

instrument. An appropriate balance has to be found between that necessary activity and devotion of energy to other substantive work. Fortunately, a core group of consistent Signatory State contributors to the IOSEA MoU have made that task easier than it might otherwise have been over the past ten years.

25. During the reporting period, grant proposals were successfully prepared to secure funding for the present Meeting of the Signatory States, as well as the inception of the Capacity-building/Technical Support programme. Funds were secured from CMS to conduct a successful strategic planning exercise over two days in February 2009, with excellent input provided by IOSEA Advisory Committee members, Focal Points and others. In his capacity as Senior Advisor to the Convention on Migratory Species, the Coordinator also played a key role in the development of a concept for a secretariat unit to service various CMS agreements in Abu Dhabi and negotiated the provisions of a \$3.6 million budget proposal with the Abu Dhabi authorities.

26. Finally, considerable time was invested during 2010-11 in efforts to secure a host Government for the present Meeting of the Signatory States. These efforts were ultimately not successful and it was therefore decided to hold meeting in Bangkok, the seat of the secretariat. The arrangements were progressing well until southern Thailand began to experience flooding of disastrous proportions, causing serious disruption to infrastructure and forcing postponement of the meeting.

### **Work programme for the year ahead**

27. The work programme of the Secretariat will be shaped by the outcomes of the present meeting, and will depend on the decisions taken with respect to a number of agenda items. However, some core activities can already be identified which will continue to demand attention, notably:

- Promoting and facilitating the establishment of sub-regional co-ordination mechanisms where these do not already exist, through increased contact with selected intergovernmental bodies;
- Developing closer linkages with selected non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations, particularly those whose activities span several countries in the region;
- Reinforcing ties with regional fisheries bodies that have a critical role to play in managing marine turtle by-catch;
- Further development of the proposal to formally recognise sites of importance for marine turtles;
- More proactive awareness-raising among decision-makers not only in Signatory States, but also in non-Signatory Range States to encourage membership, as well as other States with an interest in the MoU;
- Ongoing maintenance of the IOSEA website and development of additional tools for analysing the national reports, particularly the information on sites and threats; and
- Overseeing timely implementation of a number of projects funded by CMS/IOSEA.

#### *Action requested / expected outcome:*

Signatory States are invited to note the report of the Secretariat, to seek any clarification that might be necessary, and to reflect on any additional activities that may warrant inclusion in the Secretariat's work programme over the coming year, subject to there being sufficient resources for implementation.