



Revised Draft Terms of Reference for the Western Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force

The WIO-MTTF, at their [9th meeting](#) in March 2021, agreed revised Terms of Reference (ToR). These were then sent to the National Focal Points of the countries in the WIO region to approve them.

Objections were received from the Government of Mauritius related to the territorial dispute regarding the Chagos Archipelago. The Secretariat has drafted the proposed revision to the ToR found in this document to respond to Mauritius' concerns without prejudice to the matter at hand. Specifically, substantial changes were made to sections 1 and 3 of the document.

The WIO-MTTF will be requested to consider and discuss the draft contained in this document, specifically sections 1 and 3, and agree the text to be circulated to National Focal Points for their approval.

In addition, the WIO-MTTF will be requested to advise whether section 7 on Roles and Responsibilities requires an update, and if so, either make changes during the meeting or agree a process for further work on the text of this section intersessionally.



DRAFT Terms of Reference for the Western Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force

1. Introduction

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) sub-region comprises the East African coast from Somalia¹ in the north to South Africa in the south, as well as the islands of the Chagos Archipelago, the Comoros, Îles Éparses, Mayotte, Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion, and Seychelles.

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The WIO region hosts five species of marine turtles: Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) and Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), and multiple life stages of each species, including breeding males and females, eggs, hatchlings, juveniles, sub-adults and foraging adults). Marine turtles are highly migratory and move across multiple national jurisdictions during their different life history stages. They also have high cultural and socio-economic significance for many communities in the region. Therefore, strong cooperation among States in the WIO region is crucial for effective conservation.

Marine turtles in the WIO region face a multitude of threats including unsustainable exploitation for meat and eggs, destruction of nesting beaches and feeding habitats, incidental mortality in fishing operations ('bycatch'), climate change, marine pollution (especially plastic); abandoned fishing nets ('ghost nets'), inappropriate beach management strategies, and predation at sea and on the nesting beach.

This Task Force was set up as a joint initiative of the [Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia](#) (hereafter: MOU) and the [Amended Nairobi Convention for the Protection, Management, and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Western Indian Ocean](#) (hereafter: Nairobi Convention).

2. Purpose and Objectives

The objective of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU is to protect, conserve, replenish and recover marine turtles and their habitats, based on the best scientific evidence, taking into account the environmental, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the Signatory States.

The Western Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force (WIO-MTTF) has been set up to promote implementation of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and its integral Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) in the WIO region. It recognizes that the Nairobi Convention provides an important political platform for raising the profile of marine turtle conservation issues in the region, while the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU offers a comprehensive conservation plan combined with effective monitoring of implementation.

The Task Force's role is one of technical support to the National Focal Points and Sub-Regional Focal Point of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and the National Focal Points of the Nairobi Convention. As technical experts with detailed knowledge of marine turtle-related research and conservation in the sub-region, Task Force Members work actively with one another and the governmental Focal Points to assist governments in the implementation of the MOU.

¹ Somalia is not yet a Signatory State to the MOU.



3. Composition

The WIO-MTTF shall consist of up to 12 technical experts nominated by Signatory States, with each country in the sub-region encouraged to nominate one Member, and additional seats available in case particular expertise is desired.

Signatory States should make their nominations based only on the technical expertise of the nominee and the knowledge they have about turtle-related work within the sub-region. In addition, Signatory States are invited to consider the expertise required to address the priorities for the sub-region as expressed in the IOSEA Work Programme.

Signatory States will use a form provided by the Secretariat for their nominations. Task Force Members will not have decision-making power nor authorization to speak on behalf of any country.

In advance of each in-person meeting of the Task Force, the Secretariat will give Signatory States the opportunity to review the membership and inform about any changes. Task Force Members are eligible for reappointment.

4. Observers

Meetings of the Task Force shall be open to participation of observers from other relevant organizations and institutions contributing to or affecting marine turtle conservation.

National Focal Points of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU shall be informed of each planned meeting and invited to attend as observers.

The following organizations shall be invited to participate in each regular Task Force meeting:

- African Union Development Agency-NEPAD ([AUDA-NEPAD](#))
- Indian Ocean Tuna Commission ([IOTC](#))
- International Union for Conservation of Nature ([IUCN](#))
- [Nairobi Convention](#)
- The Nature Conservancy ([TNC](#))
- Wildlife Conservation Society ([WCS](#))
- Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association ([WIOMSA](#))
- [WWF](#)

Additional observers, including invited experts, may be proposed by Task Force Members to the Chairs and the Secretariat, in advance of each meeting. Except for invited experts, observers shall attend the meetings at their own cost.

5. Rules of Procedure

The IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU Secretariat shall serve as the Secretariat for this Task Force.

The Task Force shall decide its own regional work programme in line with the priorities identified by the latest meeting of Signatory States and with the support of the IOSEA Advisory Committee, if necessary.

The Task Force shall organize its own business, supported by the Secretariat.

The Task Force shall strive to reach all decisions by consensus.



A quorum shall be complete when at least half of the members or their proxies are present in a meeting. If a quorum cannot be reached, the meeting will continue as an informal meeting.

The Task Force shall elect a Chair and a Vice-Chair from among its members. Their terms of office span two in-person meetings of the Task Force, after which a new election will be called for. The Chair and Vice-Chair are eligible for re-election. They shall jointly be the principal point of contact between the Task Force, IOSEA Secretariat and other stakeholders.

The members of the Task Force shall communicate the implementation of the regional work programme to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Task Force.

The Chair and Vice-Chair shall

- facilitate communications to and amongst Task Force Members, and with the Secretariat
- organize meetings of the Task Force in collaboration with the Secretariat
- report to each Meeting of the Signatory States of IOSEA on activities of the Task Force and implementation of the regional work programme
- attend, when feasible, relevant meetings of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and the Nairobi Convention to ensure the recommendations of the Task Force are brought to the attention of governments.

6. Meetings and Communications

To minimize costs, the Task Force should conduct as much of its activity as possible through electronic communication on a regular basis.

The Task Force should strive for regular meetings to review progress and decide its work programme for the next intersessional period. Meetings could include annual online meetings, as well as in-person meetings to be held at least every two years. Where possible, in-person meetings shall be arranged in conjunction with other related meetings, such as the Meetings of IOSEA Signatory States, the meeting of Nairobi Convention Focal Points, or other relevant meetings or conferences organized in the WIO sub-region.

The Secretariats of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and the Nairobi Convention shall invite each other as observers to relevant meetings, and shall strive to keep each other informed of relevant developments and opportunities to provide input to each other's processes.

Either the Chair, the Vice-Chair, or both, should endeavour to participate in the relevant meetings of the MOU and the Nairobi Convention, and may also participate in the meetings of related and associated agreements and organizations. Other members are also encouraged to attend as observers.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Taking into account the priorities set by Signatory States in the Work Programme for the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU, the Task Force shall:

Strengthen regional cooperation and coordination

- Serve as the coordinating and technical advisory body on marine turtle conservation to Signatories from the WIO sub-region.



- Develop linkages and dialogue between the conservation sector and other sectors and industries, such as development, tourism, planning, economy, fisheries, protected areas etc., and encourage National Committees to make these linkages.
- Support the implementation of the goals of both the Nairobi Convention and the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU.
- Advocate and direct collaborative efforts for marine turtle conservation among stakeholders, including governments, management authorities, the private sector, coastal communities and non-governmental organisations.
- Ensure good relations are maintained among Governments, NGOs, regional, national and local groups and individuals interested in marine turtle conservation, by conveying information to support ideas, goals, achievements and lessons learned.

Review and Reporting

- Develop and standardize protocols for data collection, management and data sharing for research and monitoring programmes.
- Develop methods to regionally review the collective implementation of national commitments to the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU, making use of the standardised IOSEA National Report template.
- Review and recommend best practice principles for activities requiring the interaction with turtles such as monitoring, education facilities (aquaria) and hatcheries, filming and ecotourism ventures.
- Promote both biophysical and socio-economic monitoring and more effective coordination with regional and international monitoring programmes.

Planning, Conservation and Management

- Collaborate with National Committees, NGOs, regional, national and local groups and individuals interested in marine turtle conservation to recommend coherent subregional priorities for marine turtle conservation, based on the IOSEA CMP.
- Encourage signatories and non-signatories to the MOU to develop national marine turtle conservation action plans or strategies within the context of the regional framework of the Nairobi Convention and IOSEA CMP.
- Work with National Committees to ensure national planning is compatible with marine turtle conservation planning across the region.
- Obtain government and convention endorsement for a regional strategy.
- Collaborate with National Committees to prioritise future work for the implementation of the IOSEA MOU with individual respect given to each country's situation.
- Solicit funds for activities to be undertaken by the WIO Marine Turtle Task Force and assist in fundraising for other marine turtle conservation activities/projects that will benefit the region and individual countries.
- Assist National Committees to solicit funding for national conservation activities.

Capacity Building

- Support the development of local capacity in research, management and governance by identifying capacity needs, implementing exchange programmes or (where possible) seeking resources to conduct research and monitoring programmes.
- Facilitate the creation or strengthening of National Committees in all countries.
- Encourage National Governments to recognise local issues and establish national legislation or enforcement to further protect marine turtles and their habitats

Facilitate Communication



- Provide and facilitate access to technical advice. Act as a reference body and provide advice on proposals for marine turtle conservation projects in the region. Encourage proposals to have a regional perspective and provide linkages between local, national and regional networks where possible.
- Facilitate linkages and collaboration with regional organisations such as IUCN, WIOMSA, WCS, WWF, SWIOFC, and IOTC.
- Facilitate communication and the dissemination of information for the purposes of scientific and public awareness.
- Facilitate and support communication at the national level and serve as a platform to coordinate local initiatives (where required in the absence of national committees).
- Encourage active participation in sub-/regional meetings by institutions and relevant parties in order to raise awareness about priority and emerging issues concerning marine turtles.

The sub-region has very limited resources for implementation. It is therefore expected that the responsibilities and activities should not be reliant on many additional resources from governments. All activities of the WIO-MTTF will take place in consultation with the Secretariat, and will seek additional resources, opportunities and frameworks.