



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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NATIONAL REPORTING

Background

1. The Memorandum of Understanding calls upon Signatory States to provide to the Secretariat a regular report on their implementation of its provisions. An Online Reporting Facility was developed to allow Signatory States to submit and update information in a standardised format over the internet. The system has sufficient flexibility to allow for in-depth responses, where necessary, and makes use of "tick-boxes" where appropriate to simplify data entry. The online database contains a vast amount of information on measures the Signatory States and other partners have undertaken to implement the MoU's Conservation and Management Plan (CMP).
2. The submission of information in electronic format allows for a wide range of queries and report generation. The data provided can be used for comprehensive analyses of strengths and weaknesses in the application of the IOSEA MoU, and is readily available for online browsing to all those with an interest in the subject matter.
3. The system is designed to generate reports on several levels. If one is interested in a particular Signatory State, the full report of that country can be requested. Reports can also be produced in relation to any of the six objectives of the CMP, and any one of the CMP's specific activities (by country or sub-region or all Signatories). Printing out the results of a tailor-made query is as simple as hitting the print command of an internet browser.
4. The system was launched in July 2004, when IOSEA Focal Points were given exclusive viewing access and were invited to request from the Secretariat a unique password to enable them to edit their reports. The system was formally opened for public viewing at the beginning of September 2004.
5. Recognizing that not all Signatory States have uniformly good access to the internet, the Secretariat has always provided an alternative that allows users to provide their reports, exceptionally, in MS-Word format, which can then be transferred relatively easily to the online template.
6. In October 2004, the Secretariat announced that it would prepare a preliminary, detailed assessment of reporting and implementation based on information contained in the Online Reporting Facility as of early November. The aim of this preliminary review was to give Signatory States an opportunity to consider the initial findings and to revise their reports accordingly, prior to the final deadline for submission of national reports, on 31 January 2005. Thereafter, a final analysis of reporting and implementation was prepared for circulation in advance of the Third Meeting of Signatory States (Document MT-IOSEA/SS.3/Doc. 7.2 and Annex, circulated on 1 March 2005).

Submission of reports

7. At the time of writing, virtually all Signatory States had submitted reports for inclusion in the online database. United Republic of Tanzania has recently submitted a very comprehensive report, however it was submitted only in MS-Word and it was not prepared in line with the IOSEA reporting

template. Further consultation is needed to agree on a way for making the necessary transformation. The database contains very limited information for Jordan, gleaned from an unrelated report, but is hoped that this deficiency will be rectified very soon. With these few exceptions, the level of reporting coverage is otherwise rather comprehensive.

8. Other issues of relevance to the reporting process are completeness, accuracy and up-to-dateness. As regards the first two issues, a cursory review of the national reports reveals considerable variability in the degree of completeness, with some Signatories providing very comprehensive reports, while others are lacking information in a number of areas. In some, but not all cases, this phenomenon is likely correlated with the resources available for implementation and reporting. Though it is difficult to assess and comment on the accuracy of the statements made in the national reports, a similar correlation may well exist.

9. One can, however, comment on the up-to-dateness of the reports. On the positive side, almost all of the information which the Signatory States will be considering in their deliberations at the Third Meeting has been submitted within the last 12 months. At least eight Signatory States are known to have updated their reports since the beginning of 2005: Australia, Bangladesh, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, (United Republic of Tanzania), and Viet Nam. Two these (Myanmar and Sri Lanka) have made extensive revisions within the last month. This figure may well be higher, since it is possible that some Focal Points may have updated their reports, but overlooked to revise the completion date in the "General Information" section.

10. Notwithstanding the uncertainty just mentioned, it is of some concern that many of the remaining twelve Signatory States appear not to have revised their reports since the first or second trimester of 2004. It is known, with certainty, that five Signatory States (Cambodia, Comoros, Jordan, Madagascar, and Thailand¹) have not revised their reports for about a year, since their Focal Points still have not requested their password to access the Online Reporting Facility.

11. The overall picture that emerges is one of considerable progress in reporting over the past two years, but with some deficiencies that need correcting and, as always, improvements to be made in the quality of the information provided. Some technical issues remain, and will likely persist until internet access improves generally across the globe. If the reporting system can be criticized for being ahead of its time, the pace of technological advances is such that it will not be long before an acceptable level internet connectivity is commonplace.

12. One improvement that could already be made is to enhance the capacity of the server on which the Online Reporting Facility (and the rest of the IOSEA Website) resides. As mentioned in the Report on Financial and Administrative Matters (Document MT-IOSEA/SS.3/Doc. 11), the UNEP-RRCAP is generously hosting the IOSEA website free of charge. However, the actual server is rather old and has limited memory and CPU capacity. Signatory States may wish to consider making an investment to replace this vital hardware, which would bring noticeable improvements for all users. In view of the increased traffic that can be expected during the Year of the Turtle campaign in 2006, serious consideration should be given to this equipment upgrade.

National reporting template

13. The first exercise to review the national reports submitted by Signatory States highlighted various aspects of the reporting template itself that are in need of modification. In its current design, the reporting template seeks to reflect as far as possible all of the activities containing in the Conservation and Management Plan and to remain faithful to the phrasing used in that fundamental text. It is clear, however, that there is some inherent duplication and lack of clarity within the CMP that ought to be filtered out in the design of the reporting template. To that end, the Secretariat has undertaken an exhaustive exercise to review the reporting template in order to address a number of concerns, primarily related to duplication and repetition, raised by Signatory States.

¹ Viet Nam has also not requested its password, but has submitted a comprehensive report in MS-Word format which the Secretariat posted online.

14. Annex 1 contains a draft Revised Template for the Submission of National Reports. The changes made to the template are detailed in the attachment. Among the key alterations:

- Nearly 25 questions have been deleted or consolidated into other questions;
- About 30 questions have been reformulated or their language simplified;
- About 25 questions have had only minor rewording (18) or have not been changed;
- Three existing questions have been split in two, for clarity;
- A new “menu approach” has been introduced into three questions; some of the questions now incorporate an additional scale to allow for a more refined response;
- The menu approach has been dropped from two of the existing questions.

15. The result is a template that remains faithful to the most important aspects of the Conservation and Management Plan, is much more streamlined and removes virtually all of the duplication and repetition inherent in the original template.

16. Once this revised template is adopted, subject to further amendments that Signatory States may wish to introduce, the Secretariat will go about revising the Online Reporting Facility so that, as far as possible, much of the original data already submitted by Signatory States is retained. This process, which involves reprogramming the software, will be done gradually over the course of 2005.

In introducing these changes, the Secretariat has tried to strike a balance between the need to improve the online template as far as possible, yet retain the basic structure in which so much software development time has already been invested. Hopefully the proposals that have been made fall within those bounds. Should any of the proposals be technically unfeasible or prohibitively expensive to implement, the Secretariat seeks discretion to make any necessary adjustments.

Action requested / Expected outcome

Signatory States are invited to study the revised template for submission of national reports; to prepare – in advance of the meeting – written suggestions for any additional changes; to form working group (as necessary) to consider these additional suggestions; and to adopt the revised template for inclusion in the Online Reporting Facility at least four months in advance of the Fourth Meeting of the Signatory States.