



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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FOURTH MEETING OF THE SIGNATORY STATES
Muscat, Oman, 11-14 March 2006

REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

Recruitment of Signatory States

1. Since the Signatories last met in March 2005, the Memorandum of Understanding has taken effect in another four States of the region: South Africa (1 May 2005), Indonesia (1 June 2005), Saudi Arabia (1 November 2005), and Eritrea (1 February 2006). This brings the total number of States participating in the MoU to 24. The year-on-year growth is slightly less than anticipated, however it is hoped the 2006 Year of the Turtle will serve as an impetus for addition States to join, particularly those that have given indications in the recent past that they are close to formalising their commitment -- such as Brunei Darussalam, France, Malaysia, and Yemen.

2. Over the past year, the Coordinator has solicited many potential Signatory States – through direct personal contacts and/or in writing – with a view to encouraging them to sign the Memorandum of Understanding. All non-Signatories were invited to attend the present Meeting, and a special approach was made to Ministers from the West Asia sub-region. The table at Annex 1 summarises the efforts that have been made in this regard. Participants are invited to review this information and to make a concerted effort during the Year of the Turtle, through diplomatic channels and personal contacts, to encourage the remaining countries to come on board.

Substantive activities undertaken

3. The following sections summarise the main activities in which the Secretariat has been engaged over the past year:

Facilitating information exchange

4. 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 very limited capacity, the most cost-effective means of disseminating information is via the IOSEA website (www.ioseaturtles.org). A significant investment was made during the course of 2005 to overhaul the website from top to bottom, not only to improve its appearance and functionality from a user standpoint, but also to enhance and automate many of the applications that the Secretariat uses ‘behind the scenes’ to keep the information up-to-date. These tools have greatly simplified the task of adding news stories, posting features and documents, and updating various databases (see also document MT-IOSEA/SS.4/Doc. 13). The time involved in maintaining the website has been significantly reduced, allowing more effort to be focussed on content and other issues.

5. The monthly ‘E-News’ service was also upgraded and enhanced as part of the package to redesign the website. An e-mail is sent out each month to a fixed subscriber list of well over 500 individuals, containing a number of features from the previous month and clickable links to headlines and other stories that readers may have missed if they were not frequent visitors to the website. This service has been very well received, as evidenced by the number of new subscribers signing up every month.

6. The Secretariat deliberately separated the task of redesigning the website from another substantial effort to reprogram the Online Reporting Facility, to make it more responsive to user needs. As

reported elsewhere, in document MT-IOSEA/SS.4/Doc. 8.1, the system was completely reworked to integrate the changes to the reporting template agreed by the Third Meeting, and to introduce some major innovations in the operation of the system. The underlying database was also physically relocated to another internet service provider (in the United States) with a view to improving access times. All of this work, done through a consultancy, required a substantial investment of the Secretariat's time in terms of feedback and oversight. This has already begun to pay dividends, allowing the Secretariat to generate within a relative short timeframe a very comprehensive and objective review of the MoU's implementation. In the past, this exercise was more subjective and took considerably more effort to prepare.

7. The Online Projects Database now contains detailed descriptions of more than 60 project activities in some 22 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. In 2005, an extremely versatile search facility was incorporated that allows users to query the database using keywords. For example, typing in the keyword "community" will generate a list of projects that have some direct bearing on this aspect of conservation. Over the coming year, there is a need to review and possibly solicit updates to existing entries in addition to including more projects.

8. Other aspects of the website received less attention in 2005, mainly because of less than expected contributions from collaborators and users. Enhancements to the Interactive Mapping System (IMaPS) that had been anticipated following last years' Advisory Committee meeting have not yet materialised; only minor adjustments were made to the system in the last 12 months. The Flipper Tag Series database, which displays information about the flipper tag series used in countries around the IOSEA region, has been augmented with details of only a few more countries. Data are still missing for some countries, and probably needs updating for others.

Projects

9. The Secretariat has been responsible for the initiation or oversight of a number of project activities over the past year, including the following:

- *Tracing the Migrations of Indian Marine Turtles: Towards an Integrated and Collaborative Conservation Program.* Implementing agencies: Centre for Herpetology, Madras Crocodile Trust; and Wildlife Institute of India. USD 34,500 co-funding from the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). This project is virtually concluded and a draft final report is expected to be tabled under Agenda item 9d (Document MT-IOSEA/SS.4/Doc. 8.4).
- *Advancing Sea Turtle Conservation in Kenya.* Implementing agency: Kenya Sea Turtle Conservation Committee (KESCOM). USD 16,450 co-funding from Government of United Kingdom, via CMS. An interim progress report was provided in October 2005 (also included in Document MT-IOSEA/SS.4/Doc. 8.4). A second instalment of funding is still pending. As some changes have been announced recently in the management of the implementing agency, the Secretariat plans to take advantage of the presence in Muscat of the Chair of KESCOM, Dr. Nyawira Muthiga, to discuss and resolve any outstanding issues before making the final payment soon after the Fourth Meeting.
- The Secretariat received a very good response to its advertisement on the IOSEA website for small-scale proposals to carry out activities during the Year of the Turtle (YoT). These are currently under review and recommendations with respect to funding will be sent shortly to the YoT Steering Committee for final review and comment. Thereafter, it is hoped that a simple letter of agreement can be drawn up with each of the successful applicants so that the funds can be transferred as soon as possible. Funding for these activities is being provided by the Governments of Australia, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States, to which an expression of thanks is gratefully extended.

Marine turtle site network proposal

10. At the Fourth Meeting of the Signatory States, the Secretariat introduced a revised version of the proposal to establish a network of sites of importance, which had been discussed and agreed in principle at the Second Meeting (reproduced in Document MT-IOSEA/SS.4/Doc. 10). Both the Advisory Committee and the Signatory States deliberated the proposal at length, and made useful suggestions for its further development. The latter discussion is summarised in paragraphs 39 to 43 of the Report of the Third Meeting of Signatory States (Bangkok, March 2005), reproduced as Document MT-IOSEA/SS.4/Inf. 3.

11. The SS3 Chairman concluded that there was broad support for the idea of a network of sites, as it could provide practical conservation outcomes under the IOSEA MoU. The Meeting agreed to seek further advice from the Advisory Committee regarding the development of criteria for the selection of sites, and to provide further comments on the paper to the Secretariat by mid-May 2005. As a consequence of its preoccupation with Year of the Turtle preparations over the past 12 months, the Secretariat has not been in a position to devote more time to the further development and promotion of the proposal as it had originally intended. In particular, the necessary work to finalise the criteria for the nomination and selection of sites has not advanced, although this question is expected to be revisited by the Advisory Committee when it meets on 9-10 March.

12. More positively, the Secretariat has shared the site network proposal with colleagues in the UNEP Division of Global Environment Facility (GEF) Coordination, with a view to seeking advice on whether the proposal might have potential for funding under GEF. UNEP/GEF was instrumental in the development of two other major projects with the Convention on Migratory Species (IOSEA's parent organisation) that received substantial funding from GEF. It is expected that UNEP/GEF will advise whether and how the proposal may need to be transformed to make it more suitable and attractive for GEF funding, at a time when the criteria for selection of projects are undergoing fundamental revision (which could be detrimental to regional projects such as this one).

Sub-regional coordination and inter-agency cooperation

13. Within the limits of the Secretariat's capacity, progress was made to reach out to a number of other bodies with which IOSEA ought to be collaborating. The Secretariat pursued, within the framework of the Nairobi Convention, the concept of a Western Indian Ocean Task Force to help implement the IOSEA MoU on subregional level. The Coordinator attended a meeting of Nairobi Convention Focal Points in Dar es Salaam in November 2005, where agreement in principle was reached to develop the terms of reference for such a task force. The Secretariat has been working with South Africa to have a working draft presented at the present meeting.

14. Discussions initiated by the Secretariat in 2003-2004 with the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) have unfortunately not led to any concrete results thus far, not because of a lack of interest of either party, but rather because of lack of spare capacity. The finalisation of the CMS-funded report that deals, in part, with aspects of collaborative conservation in India (mentioned in para. 9, above) might give renewed impetus to revisiting the potential for SACEP involvement in sub-regional activities.

15. The Secretariat interacted with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) for the first time in 2005, seeking to raise the profile of turtle by-catch in that forum. It participated in the Ninth Session of the Commission (30 May – 3 June 2005), which adopted a resolution addressing the issue of sea turtle mortality in fishing operations and explicitly acknowledging the work of IOSEA. The Secretariat followed up this first initiative by participating in the IOTC's Working Party on Bycatch, which happened to be organised in Thailand in July 2005.

16. The Secretariat has also sought to collaborate with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), particularly in the area of fisheries-turtle interactions. Following the Third

Meeting of the Signatory States, the Secretariat revised the IOSEA reporting template to accommodate questions that would help Signatory States to simultaneously meet reporting commitments in relation to the FAO Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations. It is pleasing to note that, for the very first time, a representative of FAO is expected to be in attendance at the Fourth Meeting.

17. On a sub-regional level, the Secretariat continues to enjoy fruitful relations with the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), having been invited to participate in one of its technical consultations on sea turtles in Malaysia in April 2005. SEAFDEC has been active in publishing useful technical information on marine turtle conservation, most recently a guide on tagging which bears the IOSEA Year of the Turtle logo. The IOSEA Secretariat has returned the favour by helping to advertise and distribute the guide from Bangkok, and it has been well received. A senior SEAFDEC officer from the Information and Extension Division (Mr Bundit Chokesanguan) is currently serving on the IOSEA Advisory Committee; and SEAFDEC is expected to be represented by another officer at the Fourth Meeting.

18. The Secretariat established direct contact with the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA) in August 2005. Although PERSGA has apparently not taken up the Secretariat's invitation to attend the present meeting, the response of PERSGA's Secretary General to that first engagement was very positive. Thus, there is every reason to believe that it will be possible to build closer ties with that organisation. The Secretariat requests Signatory States that are members of PERSGA do everything possible to facilitate the exchange of information between PERSGA and IOSEA.

19. 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, until now, to consider a more formal working relationship with the IAC, the exchange of information to this point has been very positive.

20. Finally, in the course of preparing the Year of the Turtle campaign, closer ties have been forged with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), resulting in coordination of the launches of the two regional YoT awareness campaigns on the same day (1 March 2006).

Meetings attended

21. Time and budget constraints continued to limit the amount of travel that could be undertaken on behalf the IOSEA MoU over the past year; and several of the missions that were undertaken were combined with CMS-related activities (see below) in order to reduce costs. The Coordinator conducted seven IOSEA missions between April 2005 and March 2006, as follows: SEAFDEC regional technical consultation on sea turtles (Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia: 24-25 April 2005); Ninth Session of the IOTC (Victoria, Seychelles: 30 May-3 June 2005); IOTC Working Party on Bycatch (Phuket, Thailand: 19-20 July 2005); Third International Fishers Forum (Yokohama, Japan: 26-29 July 2005); International Marine Protected Areas Congress (Melbourne, Australia: 23-28 October 2005); Nairobi Convention Focal Points meeting (Dar es Salaam, 18 November 2005); and consultations with Omani authorities on preparations for SS4 (Muscat, Oman: 3-5 December 2005).

22. Under the arrangement whereby the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) makes a significant contribution to the operating costs of the Secretariat, approximately 20 percent of the Co-ordinator's time is devoted to CMS work in the Asia region. Many of these activities have no direct relation to the IOSEA MoU, however there may be positive ancillary benefits from the contacts that have been established. The Coordinator represented CMS at the Asian Regional Meeting of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Beijing, 13-16 May 2005); a meeting of the Central Asian Flyway Action Plan for migratory birds (New Delhi, 10-13 June 2005); a meeting on Dugong conservation in the IOSEA region (Bangkok, 23-25 August 2005); and the 4th Project Steering Committee meeting of the

UNEP/GEF Siberian Crane/Wetlands project (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 30 November- 2 December 2005). He also attended a CMS family brainstorming meeting (Bonn, Germany, 6-7 June 2005) and participated in the Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (Nairobi, 19-25 November 2005), on which occasion the Ambassador of Eritrea signed the IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU.

General / Secretariat staffing

23. The IOSEA 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 very productive work environment. In April 2005, together with other UNEP/ROAP colleagues, the Secretariat relocated to the 2nd floor of the UN building, as part of a general rearrangement of office space, with a minimum of disruption to regular activities and communications. The available office is adequate to meet the Secretariat's needs for the foreseeable future.

24. The Secretariat continues to be staffed by one full-time officer (Coordinator/Senior CMS Advisor). The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) sponsored a volunteer 'Youth Ambassador' who was attached to the Secretariat from March 2005 through February 2006; and a second one from September 2005 through February 2006. Additionally, a consultant was engaged more or less full-time from June to November 2005 to assist with the organisation of the Year of the Turtle campaign; her contract was extended through the end of March 2006 by combining various sources of funding.

25. Consultancies have contributed to several of the other advances made over the past year, including the redesign of the IOSEA website, reprogramming of the Online Reporting Facility, compilation of the leatherback-tsunami assessment (Document MT-IOSEA/SS.4/Doc. 9), preparation of the new IOSEA brochure, design of the successful Year of the Turtle 2006 wall calendar, and printing of these and other information materials. All of these consultancies have worked out extremely well, and have justified the substantial amount of time invested in organising them and overseeing their execution.

Work programme for the year ahead

26. 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:

- Further development of the marine turtle site network proposal; and coordination of 2006 Year of the Turtle activities;
- 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;
- 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 – taking more advantage of synergies arising from the co-location arrangement with the UNEP regional office;

- Ongoing maintenance of the IOSEA website (discussed in more detail in document MT-IOSEA/SS.4/Doc. 13), 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.

Summary of Secretariat recruitment efforts among non-Signatory States

REGION/POTENTIAL SIGNATORY STATE	LATEST CONTACTS	REMARK
<i>South-East Asia "plus"</i>		
Brunei Darussalam	Embassy of Brunei Darussalam, Bangkok, and UN Permanent Mission, New York	December 2005 – March 2006
Malaysia	Dept. of Fisheries etc. – Terengganu workshop, April 2005; Director, Turtle and Marine Ecosystem Centre (TUMEC) – ca. November 2005	Malaysia attended SS3 (2005) and representatives are registered to attend SS4 also
Papua New Guinea	Dept of Environment and Conservation	No recent contact; some interest in PNG NGO participation in SS4
Singapore	National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University	Attended SS3
Timor Leste	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, National Directorate for Fisheries and Aquaculture	Director of Fisheries Resources Management attended SS3; but no apparent follow-up
China	State Forestry Administration and Fisheries Bureau (consultations in Beijing in May 2005)	Observers from Fisheries Bureau are expected to attend SS4
Japan	Min. of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries – Fisheries Agency	FAO COFI, March 2005; IOTC, June 2005; IFF3, July 2005
Republic of Korea	Min. of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries – International Cooperation Office	FAO Technical Consultation, Dec. 2004; IFF3, July 2005
<i>Northern Indian Ocean</i>		
India	Ministry of Environment and Forests	Numerous informal contacts, and formal invitation to SS4 (no acknowledgement received)
Maldives	Ministry of Fisheries, Agriculture and Marine Resources – Marine Research Centre; Ministry of Environment	CBD SBSTTA, Feb 2005
<i>Northwest Indian Ocean</i>		
Bahrain	Public Commission for the Protection of Marine Resources, Environment and Wildlife	Special (2 nd) invitation in January 2006 to take part in SS4 and sign MoU in Muscat (no reply)
Djibouti	Ministere de l'habitat, de l'urbanisme, de l'environnement et de l'aménagement du territoire	No recent contact, apart from SS4 invitation
Egypt	Min. of State for Environmental Affairs – Environmental Affairs Agency	Special (2 nd) invitation in January 2006 to take part in SS4 and sign MoU in Muscat (no reply)
Kuwait	Environment Public Authority	Special (2 nd) invitation in January 2006 to take part in SS4 and sign MoU in Muscat (no reply)

Qatar	–	Special (2 nd) invitation in January 2006 to take part in SS4 and sign MoU in Muscat (no reply)
Sudan	Wildlife Conservation, General Administration	Director, Planning and Projects Development registered to attend SS3 (no sponsorship available); no recent contact, apart from SS4 invitation
United Arab Emirates	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries	Special (2 nd) invitation in January 2006 to take part in SS4 and sign MoU in Muscat (no reply)
Yemen	Environment Protection Authority	Extensive contacts since CMS COP8; expected to be represented at SS4
<i>Western Indian Ocean</i>		
France	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Environment Sub-direction; Ministry of Ecology	CBD SBSTTA, Feb 2005; Frequent contact since SS3, most recently Jan 2006 (decision said to be pending with EU Council of Ministers)
Mozambique	National Director of Natural Resources, Ministry of the Coordination of Environmental Affairs (MICOA)	Nairobi Convention Focal Point meeting, November 2005; and subsequent (unsuccessful) interventions from South Africa
Somalia	Regional Marine Conservation Organisation (NGO based in Bosaso Puntland State)	Nairobi Convention Focal Point meeting, November 2005; RMCO will attend SS4