



# 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 now been operational for about a year and a half. It has sufficient flexibility to allow for in-depth responses, where necessary, and makes use of "tick-boxes" where appropriate to simplify data entry. The underlying 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 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. 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.

3. On 15 August 2005, the Secretariat communicated to all Signatory States the final Template for the Submission of National Reports, in MS-Word format (Annex 1). The revised template incorporates extensive changes agreed at the Third Meeting of Signatory States in March 2005, resulting in a much improved and streamlined reporting format. It includes extensive 'comment boxes' to indicate what is expected in a given response, thus enabling Signatory States to provide more informative answers. The section on incidental capture and mortality was reformulated so that it can now serve a dual purpose of reporting on implementation of the 2004 FAO Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations. The new template was made available seven months before the Fourth Meeting in order to give Signatory States ample time to compile the additional information needed to respond to the new questions, or to adjust existing information accordingly.

### *Enhancements*

4. The electronic 'online' version of the template took longer than anticipated to finalise, due to the challenges of redesigning the underlying computer software. Apart from incorporating all of the new and modified questions, the Online Reporting Facility was completely reprogrammed with a view to enhancing and extending its functionality, reducing query response times, and adding new tools for behind-the-scenes report analysis. These enhancements, which are still ongoing, reflect a major investment in programming time of an experienced consultant (Mr. David Jiles), to whom the Secretariat owes a debt of gratitude for his services (partially *pro bono*).

5. An important improvement in functionality was introduced at the request of users. Previously, any amendments made to the main report would automatically be displayed 'live' for anyone to see. The system now allows users to work on their report 'invisibly', to save the changes, and to display and print the amended report without it being publicly viewable until the Focal Point is ready for it to be displayed in the public domain. This has the advantage of allowing a Focal Point to share a draft

report among a number of users who have password access, and to receive their input before the report is finalised and submitted to the Secretariat for publication on the 'live' system. (For the time being, any updates to the Sites-Threats section continue to be displayed 'live', as they are entered in the system.)

6. The system was also improved to allow Signatories to provide more refined data in the Species/Habitats section, for example, by allowing association of a particular species to habitat type, and indicating the relative importance of a given site (Figure 1); and to specify mitigation measures in place at individual sites more completely in the Mitigation Measures section (Figure 2). The Species/Habitats section (Figure 3) now allows for more sophisticated searches to be made, although these improvements will not be evident until Signatories make the associations between species and habitat type at a given site. The query results screens (Figures 4 and 5) have already been redesigned in anticipation of this. The presentation of information in these displays has been improved and they also permit re-sorting of results by region.

7. Behind the scenes, a sophisticated monitoring and analysis module has been built into the Facility. This enables the Secretariat to easily detect and review specific changes made to the national reports, and to analyse all of the reports more systematically and objectively, using a rating system based on well-defined criteria. (Refer also to document MT-IOSEA/SS.4/Doc. 8.2.)

8. Finally, in mid-2005, the online reporting database was moved to a full-service Internet Service Provider in the United States, which should offer improved access times for most IOSEA countries. This is to avoid the serious internet bottlenecks that often occur in Asia, where the main IOSEA website is presently housed, and which could have the effect of slowing down response times.

9. On 12 December 2005, the Secretariat announced that the new Online Reporting Facility was available to receive data from Signatory States. The Secretariat made repeated attempts to encourage Signatory States to formally request a unique password to enable them to access their online reports, and at least half of them have done so. The number of Signatories that have never requested or received a password at any time is probably fewer than eight. Recognizing that not all Signatory States have uniformly good access to the internet, the Secretariat continues to provide an alternative that allows users to submit their reports in MS-Word format, which the Secretariat can then transfer fairly easily to the online template.

### *Submission of reports*

10. At the time of writing, the Online Reporting Facility contained information for 21 of the 24 Signatory States. Two of the three non-reporting countries are relatively new Signatories, having joined the Memorandum of Understanding only within the last six months. Eight Signatory States updated their reports with new information within recent weeks. Five of them (Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Philippines, Sri Lanka) used the online system, while three (Australia, Seychelles, South Africa) submitted their reports in MS-Word format, the contents of which were then transferred to the online system. The Secretariat was also able to extract some valuable information from a very comprehensive report that the United Republic of Tanzania submitted in 2005, but which had not been structured according to the IOSEA format. The 12 remaining Signatory States appear not to have updated their reports within the last year, although the Secretariat has taken the liberty of transferring some of the responses given from their 'old' reports into the relevant sections of the new template.

11. 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.

12. In terms of process alone, in 2005-2006 the overall picture of reporting that emerges is mixed. On the one hand the reporting template was markedly improved and streamlined; the Online Reporting Facility was enhanced both in terms of functionality and technical capacity; and a number of Signatory States made a good effort to enhance their reports, including in areas that had never previously been investigated. The fact that several of the Signatories using the *online* system are developing countries, with perhaps less than ideal internet connections, suggests that the system is working reasonably well.

13. On the other hand, at this stage in the Memorandum's evolution, it is disappointing that many Signatories have not updated their national reports -- even if only in MS-Word format -- using the template that was distributed in August 2005 and made available as a permanent download from the IOSEA website. In the case of Signatories with relatively good internet access and email contact, there appears to be a need to re-engage some Focal Points that have not taken the first step of requesting a password. It might be useful also to hold a workshop during the Fourth Meeting to demonstrate what the system has to offer and to explain how it works.

14. On a more positive note, the substantial investment made in reprogramming the Online Reporting Facility is evident in the substantive review of implementation progress (Document MT-IOSEA/SS.4/Doc 8.3). It is now very easy for the Secretariat to monitor performance of an individual Signatory State -- or of all Signatory States -- any time a new report is submitted, and to track and compare changes at any time during the course of a year. After incorporating information from newly submitted reports, instantaneous generation of an updated overall performance matrix is no longer beyond the realm of possibility, even during the course of a meeting.

#### *Technical aspects still to be addressed*

15. There are still a number of known programming issues and minor bugs that remain to be resolved, some visible to the user and others not. These include, for instance, the menu navigation system, some aspects of the 'behind-the-scenes' report monitoring system, and some purely cosmetic issues in relation to the on-screen displays and printed reports.

16. As mentioned elsewhere, there are some conceptual issues and potential new analytical tools that warrant further consideration and development in another phase of the project, for instance: (1) whether and how to indicate the relative importance a site for a particular species; (2) how best to analyse the large volume of data contained in the site-threat database; (3) how best to integrate the Online Reporting Facility with other related tools, such as the Interactive Mapping System (IMapS) and 'Google Earth'; (4) how best to capture a "picture of implementation progress" at a moment in time for comparison at a later date.

17. Finally, notwithstanding the streamlining of the reporting template that was carried out in 2005, and the addition of 'comment boxes', a review of the responses to some questions suggests that there may still be some redundancy that needs to be eliminated. The Secretariat would caution against tinkering too much with the existing reporting template which Signatory States, hopefully, are coming to terms with, since this has major implications for reprogramming of the software.

#### *Action requested / Expected outcome*

Signatory States are invited to offer constructive comments on their experiences in using the Online Reporting Facility; to request a tutorial on the use of the system if considered necessary/helpful; to indicate when and in what form they expect to submit their national report, if they have not already done so by the time of the meeting; and to make suggestions for further improvements to the system.