

Brief report from the IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU Secretariat – Bangkok

The Secretariat of the Indian Ocean – South-East Asia Marine Turtle MoU's activities in 2009 have included: involvement in efforts to minimise by-catch in coastal net fisheries; organisation of the first-ever IOSEA Strategic Planning session in Brisbane; participation in the 29th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation; strengthening institutional linkages with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and contributing to its deliberations on turtle conservation; active participation in a national stakeholders workshop in Kenya, leading to the adoption of a national conservation strategy; contributing to a workshop that explored solutions to the serious problem of illegal hunting of turtles in the South China Sea; and participation in various IOSEA meetings linked to the WIOMSA Symposium held in La Réunion.

Additionally, the Secretariat has continued to develop the IOSEA website as a rich source of information and practical tools for the benefit of turtle practitioners around the region. The creation of a new satellite tracking metadatabase, the development of a comprehensive Bibliography Resource for the Western Indian Ocean, and strengthening of the Projects Database are among the other innovations and enhancements realised in 2009. A new Technical Support and Capacity Building Programme, launched in September 2009 will benefit many IOSEA Signatory States should they choose to take advantage of the assistance on offer.

The Secretariat's work would not be possible without the continuing voluntary contributions from IOSEA Signatory States to meet basic operational costs, which most other CMS instruments receive as core funding. Since 2002, over USD 1.4 million in voluntary contributions have been secured from Governments and a further 0.2 million from other sources. The Secretariat would like to acknowledge the generous financial support from Australia, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States, whose contributions have underpinned the IOSEA programme for many years. It is pleased also to recognise India, Myanmar, and the Sultanate of Oman – which contributed to the IOSEA Trust Fund for the first time in 2009, in response to the appeal collectively agreed by the IOSEA membership in Bali in August 2008; and to note with appreciation the recent pledges of support from France and Thailand.

The financial situation of the IOSEA MoU remains much as it was going into the start of 2009 – with income more or less balancing expenditures thanks to new contributions helping to partly compensate for smaller than usual contributions from some traditional donors. However, this leaves little if any surplus for project activities apart from specially-earmarked programmes. While the Secretariat expects to head into 2010 with an operational balance of about USD 100,000 / € 70,000 – enough to sustain operations through April/May 2010 – additional funds are needed if it is to extend and hopefully replicate some of the IOSEA accomplishments to date. Additionally, it is hoped that sufficient funding can be secured for the organisation of the Sixth Meeting of Signatory States towards the end of 2010. Current staff levels are insufficient to fully meet operational requirements. Even one additional officer would enable the Bangkok office to extend CMS' general migratory species work in the region; and to enhance IOSEA's capacity to strengthen institutional partnerships and fundraise in support of project activities.

As Senior CMS Advisor, Mr. Douglas Hykle has continued to represent CMS in a number of regional initiatives (eg. East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership, UNEP/GEF Siberian Crane Wetland Project, Siberian Crane Memorandum of Understanding); and to provide specific advice in relation to ongoing and new species initiatives, as well as recruitment activities. In this same capacity, he was responsible for the development of the concept and negotiation of funding for the establishment of the new CMS office in Abu Dhabi.