



Memorandum of Understanding on the
Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and
their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia

Distr. GENERAL

MT-IOSEA/SS.3/Doc 8.6
Agenda item 9f

23 March 2005

THIRD MEETING OF THE SIGNATORY STATES
Bangkok, 29-31 March 2005

EXPLORATORY PAPER ON POSSIBLE EXTENSION OF THE
GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF THE MOU

1. At the Second Meeting of the Signatory States, the Secretariat outlined a proposal (Document MT-IOSEA/SS.2/Doc. 11.1) to examine the possibility of extending the geographic scope of the Memorandum of Understanding to include Pacific countries, in line with deliberations that had taken place in the framework of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the conclusions of an expert think tank, known as the “Bellagio Blueprint”. It was agreed that the Secretariat should develop an exploratory paper that would examine the possible advantages and disadvantages of, and support for, extending the geographic scope of the MoU to the Pacific for consideration by Signatory States. The Meeting agreed that the IOSEA Secretariat should seek additional resources/funds to undertake the proposed analysis so that existing resources/funds were not taken away from committed MoU activities.

2. Among the outstanding questions that the Secretariat raised in its paper last year were:

- Would the existing IOSEA MoU Signatory States be amenable to make changes to the MoU, as necessary, and to accept additional members from outside the IOSEA region?
- Would there be interest from a majority of the Pacific States/territories to participate in such an arrangement? Or, if only a few States were interested, might they be invited to join individually?
- Would the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme be prepared to assume the role of regional coordinator, under an IOSEA (or rather “IOSEAPAC”) umbrella?
- To what extent might the Memorandum of Understanding (and its Conservation and Management Plan) need to be modified to accommodate any special requirements unique to the Pacific?
- What additional resources might be required and made available for its implementation?
- Over what time frame might such an arrangement be developed?

3. Over the past year, the Secretariat accorded its highest priority to facilitating implementation of the IOSEA MoU, and did not have sufficient resources or capacity to undertake the full analysis that it would have wished. In particular, it was not possible to engage in a consultation process that would elicit feedback from Pacific countries on their interest in some form of partnership with the IOSEA MoU.

4. Nevertheless, the Department of Environment and Heritage of the Government of Australia has collaborated with the Secretariat to produce a preliminary paper that explores two options for enhancing coordination in marine turtle conservation in the Pacific region. As a representative of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) will be attending the meeting as an observer, there will be an opportunity under this agenda item to explore a number of issues in more depth.

Action requested / Expected outcome

Signatory States are invited to review the attached exploratory paper, and to decide whether the Secretariat should continue to develop it further, with a view to soliciting feedback on possible interest in extending the IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU to the Pacific, taking account of any unique needs identified for that region.

Progressing the Conservation of Marine Turtles in the Pacific

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an Options Paper

Overview

At the Second Meeting of Signatory States to the *Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia* (IOSEA MoU) in 2004, the IOSEA MoU Secretariat was directed to explore possible options for progressing marine turtle conservation outcomes in the Pacific region. As directed, the present paper explores arguments for and against expanding the current IOSEA MoU into the Pacific, or developing a new Pacific arrangement.

2. Background

A number of marine turtle stocks in the Pacific Ocean are in decline. Given the migratory nature of marine turtles, actions taken in one Range State may impact (adversely or positively) turtle conservation in the region more broadly. Poor coordination among countries in the region may therefore be hampering effective turtle conservation over a large area.

The Pacific region lacks an instrument comparable to the IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU or the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC), further to the east. Nonetheless, the need to enhance regional cooperation for the conservation of marine turtles in the Pacific has been recognized in a number of fora.

CMS COP7

The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), at its Seventh Meeting (Bonn, 2002) adopted Resolution 7.7, which:

“Endorses the [CMS] Secretariat’s proposal to explore, by the most appropriate means, the possible development of an instrument for Marine turtles in the Pacific Ocean, with the context of the CMS Strategic Plan and the existing CMS Indian Ocean- South-East Asian Marine Turtle MoU, and to allocate sufficient resources for this purpose”.

CMS COP7 also adopted Recommendation 7.6 aimed at “Improving the conservation status of the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)” across its range, including the Pacific Ocean.

Bellagio Blueprint

The Bellagio Blueprint for Action on Pacific Sea Turtles (Bellagio Blueprint), drafted by a multidisciplinary expert group in November 2003, identified a pressing need to develop a conservation arrangement for marine turtles in the Pacific Ocean. The Bellagio Blueprint recommended that options to increase regional cooperation be considered. The two most feasible options identified by the Bellagio Blueprint are extending the current IOSEA MoU into the Pacific, or developing a new Pacific agreement based on the structure of the IOSEA MoU.

IOSEA MoU

At the 2nd Meeting of IOSEA MoU Signatory States in 2004, the Secretariat was directed to explore possible options for progressing marine turtle conservation outcomes in the Pacific region.

“It was agreed that the Secretariat should develop an exploratory paper that would examine the possible advantages and disadvantages of, and support for, extending the geographic scope of the MoU to the Pacific for consideration by Signatory States”.

The development of a new Pacific arrangement or the expansion of the current IOSEA MoU into the Pacific should increase the level of resources available for marine turtle conservation and management within the Pacific region and result in tangible conservation benefits for marine turtles.

3. Options

Progressing marine turtle conservation outcomes in the Pacific region requires greater regional cooperation. Two options are proposed with that objective in mind:

Extending the IOSEA MoU to encompass the Pacific region

One option is to extend the IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU to the Pacific, taking into account any unique needs identified for that region, and making use of the existing capacity of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) for sub-regional coordination (i.e. effectively creating a fifth sub-region under the IOSEA MoU). A determination would have to be made of what is not already in the existing IOSEA MoU that would need to be incorporated to address any special needs of Pacific countries.

The extension of the IOSEA MoU, in some form, to encompass the Pacific region has a number of advantages, namely:

Structural

The IOSEA MoU is an established, functioning arrangement with a well-developed Conservation and Management Plan. It has a fully-operational secretariat linked to the United Nations Environment Programme, which lends it solid institutional support. The MoU has a membership of over 20 Signatory States, a number of which share turtle populations with their Pacific neighbours. Extending the IOSEA MoU to cover the Pacific region may be less complicated than developing an entirely new agreement. Sub-regional coordination would effectively still occur within the Pacific region, through SPREP, with the IOSEA MoU assuring a certain level of harmonisation and standardisation of desired outcomes across a wide area.

Financial

The extension of the IOSEA MoU offers a more cost-effective solution to progress marine turtle conservation in the Pacific than the elaboration of a brand new instrument or institutional structure. Through its website, the IOSEA MoU already has in place a number of versatile information management tools, that could be adapted relatively easily at minimal cost to cover countries of the Pacific Ocean, such as: the Interactive Mapping System (IMapS), Online Reporting Facility, Projects Database, Flipper Tag Series, Electronic library, and current news service. Some of these applications already include information from Pacific countries.

Disadvantages of expanding the IOSEA MoU into the Pacific region include:

Structural

Integration of SPREP's Regional Marine Turtle Conservation Programme (SPREP RMTCP) into the IOSEA MoU may be difficult to manage. Without additional capacity, the current IOSEA MoU Secretariat might struggle to effectively coordinate actions across such a large area and among growing numbers of Signatory States. There is an unquantified risk that without increased resources, the IOSEA MoU might become dysfunctional should its geographic boundaries be enlarged to cover the Pacific.

Integration

Pacific countries may not wish to be affiliated with the IOSEA MoU, even through a familiar SPREP connection for coordination purposes, and may prefer to have a completely separate arrangement specific to the Pacific.

Developing a new Pacific regional agreement

An alternative to this first approach would be to develop a brand new arrangement that would serve to formalise and strengthen SPREP's Regional Marine Turtle Conservation Programme, and draw on experiences gained from the development and implementation of the IOSEA MoU.

The advantages of developing a new Pacific regional agreement include:

Structural

The Pacific region has a number of programmes, organisations and conventions of relevance to the conservation of marine turtles. It is anticipated that the SPREP RMTCP (encompassing 25 countries in the Pacific region) could effectively be transformed to address turtle conservation and management needs in the region without necessarily having structural ties to an organisation based outside of the region.

Having a dedicated, self-contained secretariat for the Pacific would enable actions to be effectively coordinated across the region, independent of external influences. With adequate resources, it could still make programmatic linkages to the IOSEA MoU to the west and the IAC to the east.

Flexibility

Modelled on the structure of the IOSEA MoU, a Pacific Conservation and Management Plan would recognise the unique needs and issues with regard to turtle conservation and management faced by Pacific countries. The development of a Pacific-specific Conservation and Management Plan would allow Pacific countries to own the final product, ensuring its acceptability.

Disadvantage of developing a new Pacific arrangement include:

Cost-effectiveness

Developing a brand new instrument, even one that builds on the RMTCP, would be costly and time-consuming – possibly requiring several rounds of negotiation over 2-3 years to arrive at a document that ultimately might not differ significantly from the IOSEA MoU.

Stability

Given the uncertainties in long-term financial support for SPREP's marine turtle programme, its capacity to lead those negotiations to a successful, timely conclusion may be in question.