

IOSEA Advisory Committee considerations in relation to the Proposal for a Network of Sites of Importance for Marine Turtles (Doc. MT-IOSEA/SS.5/Doc 6.2)

The Third Meeting of the Signatory States broadly supported the idea of a network of sites of importance for marine turtles. Advice was sought from the Advisory Committee regarding the development of criteria for the selection of sites. For various reasons, it has not been possible to revisit this issue until the meeting of the Advisory Committee held immediately prior to the Fifth Meeting of Signatory States.

Although tasked primarily with the elaboration of the site selection criteria, the Advisory Committee also discussed at length the basic concept of the “network”, reviewing possible alternative connotations, such as an “award” or “recognition” or “certification” scheme. After exhaustive discussion, the Advisory Committee proposed a neutral title for the scheme, along the lines of “IOSEA list of sites of critical importance to marine turtle conservation”; and proposed a complementary (additional) recognition scheme to acknowledge other special efforts or activities among the IOSEA membership. The latter will be covered in a separate note.

The Advisory Committee defined the objective of the “IOSEA List” as follows:

To promote the long-term conservation and protection of sites (areas, spatial units) of regional value/importance for the conservation of marine turtles and their habitats (where such areas need not be limited to nesting beaches, but could also include foraging and other areas)

The following benefits would be expected to flow from a site listing:

- Enhanced recognition among decision-makers and other stakeholders;
- Direct financial and logistic support from new sources of external funds;
- Increased opportunities for international collaboration, including technical assistance, training and capacity building

As explained in the original site network proposal, site nominations would be formally submitted by the Government of an IOSEA Signatory State. The Advisory Committee has recommended that qualification for listing be based on a site meeting a certain number (but not necessarily all) of the agreed listing criteria. This would mean that sites meeting only two or three criteria would not be eligible for listing (thus achieving a certain degree of exclusivity or special status for listed sites); but meaning also that a site could qualify for listing without necessarily fulfilling all criteria. (The precise threshold has not yet been defined.)

Maintenance in the list would imply a minimum level of compliance with the original selection criteria. Listing a site would not imply any legal obligations, unless the Signatory State specifically wished to endorse it within its own legal structures.

Provisional list of criteria for site listing (as developed by the Advisory Committee, with further elaboration of details still needed):

Regional value of a given site (ie geographic location, area, spatial unit) is defined by a combination of a certain number (not necessarily all) of the following criteria. In other words, sites would be evaluated on the basis of the following characteristics:

- A. Ecological and biological significance of the site
 - 1. Presence of management units (species/populations/genetic stocks) of critical importance;
 - 2. Number (or proportion, in terms of genetic stock) of:
 - a. species (management units);
 - b. clutches/hatchlings/recruits per unit of time;
 - c. turtles;
 - d. life stages

- B. Current protection and management status:
 - 1. Legal protection for the site and for the species present
 - 2. Management and conservation effort for the sites and for the species present

- C. Research and monitoring significance of the site:
 - 1. Index beach/site;
 - 2. Number of years of available data;
 - 3. Availability of population trends

- D. Socio-political Importance:

Social aspects:

 - a. cultural and traditional importance of the site;
 - b. economic (development) activities, human impacts and risk
 - c. educational value;
 - d. national importance;
 - e. relevant history.

- E. Relevance/significance of the site to overall conservation goal of IOSEA

The Advisory Committee concluded that while details of some aspects of the proposal have yet to be elaborated, it would not be desirable to defer its further development to the next meeting. The Committee also discussed the issue of the level within Government at which the overall site listing proposal should be endorsed; with some members holding the view that it need not be endorsed at Ministerial level.