



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

Terms of Reference for the Northern Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force

(as agreed by the 3rd Meeting of the NIO-MTTF, online, 13-14 December 2021)

1. Introduction

The Northern Indian Ocean (NIO) sub-region comprises the following Signatory States: Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The NIO region hosts five species of marine turtle (Green, Hawksbill, Leatherback, Loggerhead and Olive Ridley) and multiple life stages of these species (reproductive (mature adults and eggs), juveniles, sub-adults and adults). Marine turtles are highly migratory and move across multiple national jurisdictions during their different life history stages. They also have high cultural and socio-economic significance for many communities in the region. Therefore, strong cooperation among States in the NIO region is crucial for effective conservation.

Marine turtles in the NIO region face a multitude of threats including destruction of nesting beaches and feeding habitats, incidental mortality in fishing operations ('bycatch'), climate change, marine pollution (especially plastic); abandoned fishing nets ('ghost nets'), inappropriate beach management strategies, natural predation and unsustainable exploitation for meat and eggs.

2. Objectives

The objective of the Task Force is to serve explicitly to facilitate implementation of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU (including its Conservation and Management Plan (CMP)) in the Northern Indian Ocean sub-region and, in particular, the regional work programme decided by the Task Force.

The objective of the IOSEA MOU is to protect, conserve, replenish and recover marine turtles and their habitats, based on the best scientific evidence, taking into account the environmental, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the Signatory States.

The NIO-MTTF is therefore a technical committee spanning both scientific and management expertise.

The Task Force's role is one of technical support to the National Focal Points and Sub-Regional Focal Point of the MOU. As technical experts with detailed knowledge of marine turtle-related research and conservation in their countries, Task Force Members work actively with one another and, where applicable, the governmental Focal Points to assist governments in the implementation of the MOU.



3. Nomination and Appointment

The NIO-MTTF shall be comprised of members of each of the five Signatory States in the NIO region, nominated using a form provided by the Secretariat:

- One country representative, who can be the IOSEA Focal Point or an alternate, depending on the expertise required under the work programme of the Task Force
- One expert from a selected non-governmental organization or scientific institution appointed by each of the five IOSEA Signatory States.

Signatory States should make their nominations on the basis of the Members' technical expertise and the knowledge they have about turtle-related work in the country and within the sub-region. In addition, Signatory States are invited to consider the expertise required to address the priorities for the sub-region as expressed in the IOSEA Work Programme.

In advance of each in-person meeting of the Task Force, the Secretariat will give Signatory States the opportunity to review the membership and inform about any changes. Task Force Members are eligible for reappointment.

The Task Force shall elect its own Chair and Vice-Chair from among its members. The Chairs' terms of office span two in-person meetings of the Task Force, after which a new election will be called for. The Chair and Vice-Chair are eligible for re-election for the same position for a maximum of two consecutive terms. The Chair and Vice-Chair shall be the principal point of contact between the Task Force, Secretariat and other stakeholders.

4. Observers

Meetings of the Task Force shall be open to participation of observers from other relevant organizations and institutions contributing to or affecting marine turtle conservation.

National Focal Points and the Chair and Vice-Chair of other Marine Turtle Task Forces shall be informed of each planned meeting and be invited to attend as observers, or nominate someone to attend on their behalf.

Additional observers, including invited experts, may be proposed by Task Force Members to the Chairs and the Secretariat in advance of each meeting. Except for invited experts, observers shall attend the meetings at their own cost.

5. Rules of Procedure

The IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU Secretariat shall serve as the Secretariat for this Task Force.

The Task Force shall decide its own regional work programme in line with the priorities identified by the latest meeting of Signatory States and with the support of the Advisory Committee, if necessary.

The Task Force shall organize its own business, supported by the Secretariat.

The Task Force shall strive to reach all decisions by consensus.

A quorum shall be complete when at least one member from each country is present in a meeting.



The members of the Task Force shall communicate the implementation of the regional work programme to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Task Force.

The Chair and Vice-Chair shall

- facilitate communications to and amongst Task Force Members, and with the Secretariat
- organize meetings of the Task Force in collaboration with the Secretariat
- report to each Meeting of the Signatory States on activities of the Task Force and implementation of the regional work programme
- attend, when feasible, relevant meetings of the MOU to ensure the recommendations of the Task Force are brought to the attention of governments.

6. Meetings and Communications

To minimise costs, the Task Force should conduct as much of its activity as possible through electronic communication on a regular basis.

The Task Force should strive for regular meetings to review progress and decide its work programme for the next intersessional period. Meetings could include annual online meetings, as well as in-person meetings to be held at least every two years.

Where possible, in-person meetings shall be arranged in conjunction with the Meeting of IOSEA Signatory States or in conjunction with meetings of other international and regional bodies to review progress, confirm funding and decide on a regional work programme.

The Chair and/or Vice Chair should endeavour to participate in the relevant meetings of the MOU and may also participate on behalf of the Task Force in the meetings of related regional and international instruments and networks. Wherever possible, other Members of the Task Force are also encouraged to attend as observers.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Strengthen regional cooperation and coordination

- Serve as the coordinating and advisory body to Signatories from the NIO sub-region on marine turtle conservation.
- Develop linkages and dialogue between the conservation sector and other sectors and industries, such as development, tourism, planning, economy, fisheries, protected areas etc., and encourage National Committees to make these linkages.
- Advocate and direct collaborative efforts for marine turtle conservation among stakeholders, including governments, management authorities, the private sector, coastal communities and non-governmental organisations.
- Ensure good relations are maintained among Governments, NGOs, regional, national and local groups and individuals interested in marine turtle conservation, by conveying information to support ideas, goals, achievements and lessons learned.



Review and Reporting

- Develop and standardize protocols for data collection, management and data sharing for research and monitoring programmes.
- Develop methods to regionally review the collective implementation of national commitments to the IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU, making use of the standardised IOSEA National Report template.
- Review and recommend best practice principles for activities requiring the interaction with turtles such as monitoring, education facilities, such as rehabilitation centres and hatcheries, filming and ecotourism ventures.
- Promote both biophysical and socio-economic monitoring and more effective coordination with regional and international monitoring programmes.

Planning, Conservation and Management

- Collaborate with National Committees, NGOs, regional, national and local groups and individuals interested in marine turtle conservation to recommend coherent sub-regional priorities for marine turtle conservation, based on the IOSEA CMP.
- Encourage signatories and non-signatories to the MOU to develop national marine turtle conservation action plans or strategies within the context of the regional framework of the IOSEA CMP.
- Work with National Committees to ensure national planning is compatible with marine turtle conservation planning across the region.
- Obtain government endorsement for a regional strategy.
- Collaborate with National Committees to prioritise future work for the implementation of the IOSEA MoU with individual respect given to each country's situation.
- Solicit funds for activities to be undertaken by the NIO-MTTF and assist in fundraising for other marine turtle conservation activities/projects that will benefit the region and individual countries.
- Assist National Committees to solicit funding for national conservation activities.

Capacity Building

- Support the development of local capacity in research, management and governance by identifying capacity needs, implementing exchange programmes or (where possible) seeking resources to conduct research and monitoring programmes.
- Facilitate the creation or strengthening of National Committees in all countries.
- Encourage National Governments to recognise local issues and establish national legislation or enforcement to further protect marine turtles.

Facilitate Communication

- Provide and facilitate access to technical advice. Act as a reference body and provide advice on proposals for marine turtle conservation projects in the region. Encourage proposals to have a regional perspective and provide linkages between local, national and regional networks where possible.
- Facilitate linkages and collaboration with regional organisations such as IOTC, BOBP-IGO, SACEP, BOBLME Project, SRCWPP, IUCN, WWF, relevant SAARC Centres, etc.
- Facilitate communication and the dissemination of information for the purposes of scientific and public awareness.
- Facilitate and support communication at the national level and serve as a platform to coordinate local initiatives (where required in the absence of national committees).
- Encourage active participation in sub-/regional meetings by institutions and relevant parties in order to raise awareness about priority and emerging issues concerning marine turtles.



Considering the current level of implementation, it is clear that the sub-region has very limited resources for implementation. It is therefore expected that the responsibilities and activities should not be reliant on many additional resources from governments. All of the NIO-MTTF activities will take place in consultation with the Secretariat, and will seek additional resources, opportunities and frameworks.