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Illegal Take and Trade of Marine Turtles in the Indian Ocean Region

Background

Over recent years, the national and international illegal trade in marine turtles and their derivatives has been largely under-reported by the 35 Signatory States of the Indian Ocean South East Asia Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (IOSEA MoU), despite indications that the illegal trade in the region was expanding. A ground-breaking report on the “Illegal Take and Trade of Marine Turtles in the IOSEA Region” was produced by the IOSEA Secretariat in 2014 to examine the key patterns and trends since the year 2000, as well as to review measures taken by governments, intergovernmental bodies and NGOs to tackle the issue. This fact sheet summarises the main findings of that report, which was presented to the Seventh Meeting of the IOSEA Signatory States in Bonn, Germany in September 2014.

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Trade in South East Asia

- The consumption of turtle meat reportedly occurs in 75% of IOSEA Signatory States, while trade in turtle shells is mainly restricted to East Asian countries.
- The direct exploitation of turtles – for their meat, eggs or shells – is largely concentrated in the Coral Triangle region, which includes the waters of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste.
- Within the Coral Triangle region, much of the poaching appears to occur in Indonesian waters. In 2012, the country’s authorities warned that international trafficking of marine turtles was on the rise nationwide due to increasing demand from East Asian countries.
- ProFauna Indonesia estimated that around 1,115 green turtles were being poached every year in southeast Sulawesi alone in 2008, while a study from 2011 predicted that current poaching levels would lead to the extinction of the Aru green turtle population within two generations. Poaching in Malaysia and trade from there to China and Japan seem equally severe with 342 whole turtles seized between 2000 and 2008. Exact figures are, however, unavailable, as reporting in the region is weak.

- As for eggs, Kalimantan in Indonesia stands out as a regional hotspot for egg collection, with significant amounts being exported to the Malaysian provinces of Sabah and Sarawak, where eggs are reportedly sold openly without controls.
- Poaching of green and hawksbill turtles in the Coral Triangle appears to be perpetrated mainly by Chinese and Vietnamese turtle fisheries.
- Following the contraction of the large-scale wholesale export market in Vietnam – after a domestic ban was enacted in 2002 – much of the Vietnamese turtle catch is reportedly traded directly at sea in exchange for commodities brought from Hainan.
- The main regional trade route for whole turtles and turtle derivatives seems to originate in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The products are shipped mostly to East Asia, where demand is reportedly on the rise – both Chinese demand for turtle meat and medicine, and Japanese and Taiwanese demand for traditional crafts made of turtle scute. From 2000 to 2008, over 9,180 marine turtle derivatives were reportedly traded between the two regions.
- As of 2006, Japan remained the world's principal importer of raw scutes used for the production of *bekko*. Surveys conducted in 2004 among traders and artisans found that levels of tortoiseshell stocks and sales were not diminishing, possibly due to illegal importation from Indonesia and other Asian countries, such as Papua New Guinea, transiting through Singapore. The volume of trade to Japan is difficult to estimate due to the nature of the goods traded and to the fact that some *bekko* stocks may have remained from earlier imports.

Trade in Africa

- Green and hawksbill turtles are also targeted by local poachers particularly in the Western Indian Ocean off Kenya, Madagascar, and Mozambique. Indeed, emerging commercial activities based on marine turtle exploitation were recently reported in both Mozambique and Madagascar.
- A study carried out in southwest Madagascar in 2010 estimated that between 10,000 and 16,000 turtles were being caught annually by Vezo turtle fishermen using modern methods. But widespread poaching at sea was also reported in the north in 2012.

LEGEND

- South East Asian trade route
- South East Asian main turtle exporters
- Turtle fisheries
- High demand areas for whole turtles and turtle derivatives
- Green and hawksbill turtle poaching areas

SOUTHEAST AFRICA



POACHING IN AFRICA

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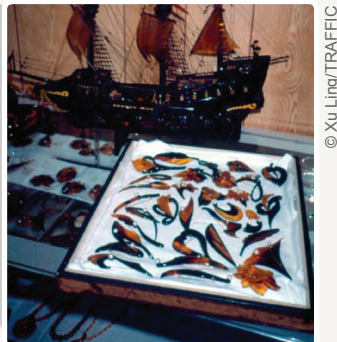
SOUTH EAST ASIAN TRADE ROUTE

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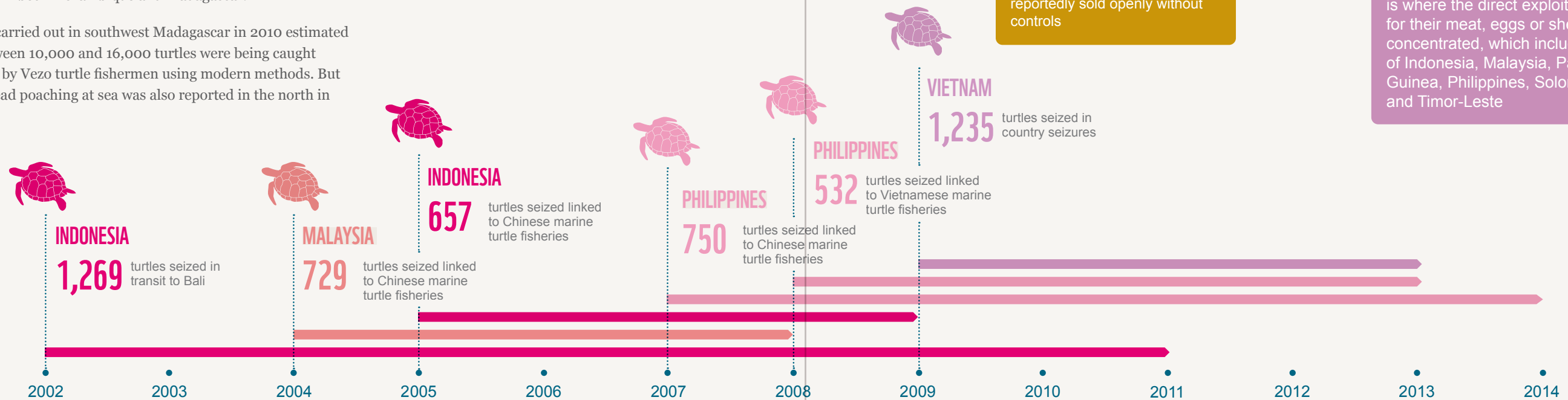
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KALIMANTAN

stands out as a regional hotspot for egg collection, with significant amounts being exported to the Malaysian provinces of Sabah and Sarawak, where eggs are reportedly sold openly without controls

THE CORAL TRIANGLE

is where the direct exploitation of turtles – for their meat, eggs or shells – is largely concentrated, which includes the waters of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste





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Drivers

- Drivers of the illegal take and trade fall into two main categories: socio-economic (relatively high prices for turtle meat, basic nutritional needs, poverty relief, and demand for luxury goods) and cultural (long-standing beliefs, specific taste preferences).
- Inadequate legislation and/or enforcement of existing regulations result in the drivers not being addressed.
- In line with their obligations under CITES as well as the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), virtually all IOSEA Signatory States have enacted legislation to prohibit direct take and trade in turtles and turtle derivatives, but there is still considerable room for improvement in some countries where current fines are an insufficient deterrent, and where existing legislation is neither harmonized nor properly enforced.
- In South-East Asia, seizures appear to be relatively well-documented but they probably represent a small fraction of the actual illegal trade. In addition, there are indications that effective law enforcement actions are often not followed up by successful prosecution and conviction of offenders.

Recommendations

With the illegal turtle trade seemingly expanding in the region, IOSEA Signatory States could boost their efforts to combat the trade by:

- Harmonising and enhancing the enforcement of existing legislation;
- Conducting more thorough research into current turtle markets and the socio-economic drivers of demand;
- Exploring and developing opportunities for alternative livelihoods to turtle poaching and illegal trade, such as turtle-based tourism;
- Tackling demand by raising public awareness; and
- Enhancing regional cooperation by working with appropriate bodies, including CITES, INTERPOL, the ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network, the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), and relevant NGOs including TRAFFIC, ProFauna Indonesia, and WWF.

Link to the full report:

http://www.ioseaturtles.org/UserFiles/File/meeting_files/MT_IO7_DOC10-1_Illegal_Take&Trade-final.pdf

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