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



SECOND MEETING OF THE SIGNATORY STATES
Bangkok, 16-19 March 2004

PROPOSAL FOR A SITE NETWORK LINKED TO THE MOU

1. The importance of maintaining the integrity of habitats important for marine turtle nesting, feeding and development is widely recognised among the conservation community. Nevertheless, the destruction and degradation of these essential habitats remains a significant source of turtle mortality throughout the region. One reason for this inconsistency may be a failure to present survey and monitoring data demonstrating the importance of a particular site in such a way as to influence decision-makers to put in place protection measures or to regulate harmful activities. The present paper outlines a proposal that would promote greater awareness and recognition of these sites of special importance, with a view to ensuring their long-term integrity.

2. The model that is proposed is based on similar programmes that were developed for migratory birds beginning in the 1980s. The so-called Important Bird Areas (IBA) programme was initiated in Europe with the aim of identifying, monitoring and protecting a network of critical sites for birds. The programme, started by a non-governmental organisation now known as BirdLife International, has since expanded to cover several continents. Around the same time, in 1985, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) was established to help protect critical migratory staging sites for shorebirds. That network has now grown to comprise 57 sites in seven countries in the Americas. More recently, within the last five years, comparable site networks have been developed for anatidae, cranes and shorebirds in the East Asia – Australasia region.

3. The principles underlying the creation of each of these site networks are similar, and parallels can be drawn with important sites for marine turtles:

“The motivating feature of the [East Asian-Australian Shorebird Site] Network is that it enables site owners, managers, participating organisations and local people to obtain international recognition for the importance of the site and their conservation efforts.”
(Source: <http://deh.gov.au/water/wetlands/mwp/guidelines/network.html>)

“Some places are especially important to protect because of the type, number or variety of birds that use them. ... An important place for birds might also be one that has a significant role in conservation awareness, education or research. ... A site can have a tremendous effect on public interest, education and support, even if it cannot be said to provide habitat critical to the survival of a species.”
(Source: <http://birds.fws.gov/documents/CelebratingSpecial.pdf>)

“Site networks provide an ideal framework for the development of site-based activities, including basic training and public awareness, management planning and support, monitoring and research, ... information and personnel exchanges.”
(Source: <http://deh.gov.au/water/wetlands/mwp/2001-2005/chapter2.html>)

4. The networks created under these programmes have successfully raised the profile of their constituent sites, and have stimulated international co-operation on a technical level. This has been accomplished by what amounts to a relatively informal, cost-effective mechanism. Typically, sites are nominated to become part of the network and may be accepted if they meet certain minimum criteria. For example, using the case of migratory birds, a site may be accepted as being of “regional” or “international” importance if it is visited by a certain number (ie tens of thousands) of birds annually, or a certain percentage of the overall flyway population. Nominations are reviewed on merit by a panel of experts, and are transmitted to a governing body for ultimate approval. Each site is inaugurated through a formal dedication ceremony, including the handover of a unique certificate, preparation of special signage etc. Among the benefits accruing to site managers are provision of educational/technical materials; assistance in developing a management plan; and support for research, monitoring, training, public outreach and educational activities. Through the network itself, opportunities are created for twinning of sites, exchange of information and personnel, and joint activities. Lessons can be learned from the development of these networks for migratory birds that could be applied in the context of a comparable site network for marine turtles.

Proposal:

To establish a network of sites considered to be of critical importance for marine turtles, according to certain agreed criteria, in order to enhance recognition of their significance among decision-makers and stakeholders, and to stimulate opportunities for international collaboration.

1. The criteria for site selection might be based on quantitative measures (eg. number of species frequenting the area; number of nests deposited over a certain time); on management considerations (e.g. capacity for local management and community support) or other considerations (eg historical importance, with potential for recovery through a re-introduction scheme, for example).
2. The management of each site would depend on local circumstances, but each should strive to embrace the new paradigm of protected areas, as articulated by Phillips (2003)¹. That is, areas which:
 - serve to meet fundamental conservation goals (eg. maximizing return of hatchlings to the wild, as far as possible through natural processes; restoration and rehabilitation of degraded habitat, etc);
 - incorporate equally important social and economic objectives, as a means of benefiting local people (eg. socio-economic development, promotion of alternative livelihoods etc);
 - are managed with regard to the needs of people who depend directly on the environment, providing for their involvement in decision-making;
 - are viewed and valued as a community asset and , through greater awareness, are also appreciated as an international asset;
 - are managed adaptively, with a long-term perspective, and with political sensitivity;
 - draw on local knowledge for their management, and benefit from the expertise of individuals from a range of relevant disciplines -- not only the realm of biology, ecology and natural resource management;
 - secure funding from a variety of sources, so as not to be entirely dependent on government goodwill.

¹ “A modern paradigm”: *World Conservation*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2003

3. How would an IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network operate? Following the migratory bird model, all management agencies, landowners, and other stakeholders (local communities, interested NGOs etc) would reach consensus on supporting the nomination of a particular site. The proponent would be required to complete a nomination form that would request detailed information about the site, and justify its addition to the network. After initial screening by the Secretariat, the proposal would be forwarded to a panel of experts for review. It is suggested that the Advisory Committee could serve this purpose. The panel would, in turn, forward its recommendations to the Meeting of Signatory States, which would decide on whether or not to accept the nomination. Thereafter, arrangements would be made to inaugurate the site, in a manner designed to maximize publicity of its new status.

4. A tool developed in 2003 by the World Bank and WWF to track management effectiveness at protected areas (Reporting Progress at Protected Area Sites, reproduced at Annex 1) could be readily adapted as a means of monitoring progress at a given site within the IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network. The tracking tool might even be a requirement for proponents to complete when submitting a site nomination.

5. The benefits of such a scheme have been outlined above: greater awareness, community involvement, national/international recognition, provision of technical assistance and moral support from belonging to a network. A given site would not necessarily have to have protected status upon nomination, but this might be one of the positive future outcomes of a site network designation.

Action requested / Expected outcome:

The Signatory States are invited to review this brief concept paper, offer comments and suggestions (orally or in writing), and, if the proposal is deemed worthy of pursuing, mandate the Secretariat to work with the Advisory Committee to develop a full proposal that could lead to the nomination of a small number of sites and the formal launch of the network at the Third Meeting of Signatory States.