



**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING  
ON THE CONSERVATION AND  
MANAGEMENT OF MARINE TURTLES  
AND THEIR HABITATS OF THE INDIAN  
OCEAN AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

CMS/IOSEA/MOS8/Doc.4

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8<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE SIGNATORY STATES

Da Nang, Viet Nam, 21-25 October 2019

Agenda Item 4

**REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT**

*(Prepared by the Secretariat)*

Action Requested:

- Take note of the report of the Secretariat
- Reflect on priority activities for the Secretariat, considering the Draft Work Programme (Doc. 8.2), subject to there being sufficient resources for implementation

## REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

1. The following sections summarize the main activities in which the Secretariat has engaged since MOS7. Secretariat arrangements and staff changes are being discussed in [Doc.13.1](#).

### Recruitment of Signatory States

2. All non-Signatory Range States (Brunei, Djibouti, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Qatar, Singapore, Somalia and Timor Leste) have been invited to attend MOS8, accompanied by a renewed invitation to sign the MOU. Registrations were received from Qatar, Singapore and Somalia.
3. Since the Signatories last met in September 2014, no new Signatories have been recruited. Somalia is the only country with a substantial coastline bordering the Indian Ocean that has yet to sign the MOU. The Secretariat has been in frequent contact with Somalia, where at working level there is high interest in signing the MOU. Efforts to obtain the necessary Full Powers for the signature are still ongoing.
4. China, Japan and the Republic of Korea have important fishing interests in the Indian Ocean, as well as marine turtle populations frequenting their waters, but have yet to show interest in joining the IOSEA MOU. These countries were also invited to MOS8.

### Organization of Meetings

#### *Marine Turtle Task Force (MTTF) Meetings*

5. The First and Second Meetings of the Northern Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force (NIO-MTTF) were held in 2015 and 2018. The meetings were co-organized by the IOSEA Secretariat and the Host Governments, Maldives and Sri Lanka, respectively. The main outcomes were the establishment of the MTTF and the agreement on concerted regional actions to conserve marine turtles, outlined in the regional work plan. The reports of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> NIO MTTF meetings can be found on the MOS8 meeting page as information documents [Inf.6.a](#) and [Inf.6.c](#), respectively.
6. The 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Western Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force (WIO-MTTF) was co-organized by the IOSEA Secretariat and Sea Sense NGO and took place in November 2017 in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania. The meeting participants provided updates on progress within their country in implementing the regional work programme 2017-2019 and agreed on follow-up actions. The report can be accessed as [Inf.6.b](#). The Secretariat also substantively contributed to the organization of and participated in the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the WIO MTTF, which took place in Mauritius in 2019. The report will shortly be published.

#### *Meetings of the NWIO and SEA+ Sub-regions*

7. The Secretariat made considerable efforts to facilitate holding the sub-regional meetings in the North-western Indian Ocean and South-east Asia as foreseen by MOS7. Despite continued efforts in the course of several years, the meetings of these sub-regions foreseen to be held between MOS7 and MOS8 have not yet taken place.
8. For the NWIO sub-region, progress was made to the point of preparation of a revised meeting concept note and draft agenda upon request of the prospective host.

## Bycatch and Cooperation with Regional Fisheries Management Organizations

9. The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Secretariat organized a capacity-building workshop in Muscat, Oman, on 18-22 October 2015, in cooperation with the CMS Secretariat (including the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and Sharks MOU), to support implementation of the IOTC's Regional Observer Scheme (as per IOTC Resolution 11/04). The five-day workshop provided expert training to facilitate the creation and implementation of observer schemes in Oman, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a specific focus on gillnet fisheries. Key issues were discussed, and potential solutions identified. Robert Baldwin, a member of the IOSEA Advisory Committee (AC), was one of three resource professionals designated to provide technical expertise during the workshop. Further information can be found [here](#).
10. In 2015, the Secretariat in coordination with IOTC drafted a memorandum of understanding between the two organizations to address in a coherent way the bycatch of marine turtles. This draft was further amended by CMS to include additional species listed on Appendix I of CMS or Appendix II species with an unfavourable conservation status, which included marine turtles, marine mammals, marine seabirds, sharks and rays. The draft was adopted by CMS and conveyed to the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of the IOTC in May 2016, but was not adopted by the Commission.
11. The IOSEA Secretariat, assisted by the AC, contributed to updating the annual IOTC marine turtle summary in 2015 and the IOTC revision of the Resolution 12/04 on bycatch in marine turtles currently in force.
12. The Secretariat prepared Doc. 10.3 titled "Developments in Relevant RFMOs" summarizing relevant information on bycatch reduction through RFMOs since 2015.

## Illegal Take and Trade

13. The synthesis paper "[Illegal Take and Trade of Marine Turtles in the IOSEA Region](#)" was originally tabled at the Seventh Meeting of IOSEA Signatory States (MOS7 Doc.10.1, Bonn, Germany, September 2014). Based on this document, IOSEA made a joint submission together with the Inter-American Convention to CITES Standing Committee in 2016.
14. The IOSEA Illegal Trade Working Group was established in 2015. With the help of the IOSEA Illegal Trade Working Group, the issue was brought to the attention of CITES, which decided to undertake a study on the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles (CITES COP Dec.17.222) in collaboration with CMS, the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC). CMS supported this study with a generous funding contribution from the Government of Australia.
15. The CITES Secretariat contracted three agencies (the World Wildlife Fund, the Marine Research Foundation and TRAFFIC) to undertake an in-situ assessment of the status, scope and trends of the legal and illegal international trade in CITES-listed species of marine turtles in eight countries within three regions: Madagascar and Mozambique (in East Africa); Colombia, Nicaragua, and Panama (in the Inter-American region); and Indonesia, Malaysia and Viet Nam (in the South-east Asia/Coral Triangle region). These countries were selected for assessment based on evidence (collected from recent literature and consultations with researchers and other experts), which indicated that they were significantly implicated in illegal trade markets for marine turtle specimens. The IOSEA Secretariat and AC members contributed substantially to the preparation and review of this report. The final version has been made available as [Inf.10.1.a](#).

16. The Secretariat prepared a summary of the CITES report on illegal trade in marine turtles for MOS8, outlining the recommendations that are relevant for IOSEA MOU (Doc. 10.1).

### **IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network**

17. A task outstanding from MOS7 was the finalization of the Itsamia (Moheli, Comoros) Site documentation. While the site had been accepted into the Network at MOS7, substantial work still needed to be done on the necessary documentation, which was incomplete at the time of the first submission of the proposal in 2014. Following consultations with the AC, which had consistently supported efforts to finalize the documents, the IOSEA Secretariat assisted in the process of preparation of the amended proposal and funded a consultancy to assist Comoros with the preparation of the required documents. The Site Information Sheet is now online and an opportunity needs to be found to present the official certificate to the Site management.
18. In addition, MOS7 had agreed that in light of the lessons learned from the first nomination cycle, the application documents, including evaluation and scoring criteria, should be reviewed. This is being discussed in detail in the Secretariat's document on the status of the Site Network (Document 9.1).

### **Development of Website and Online Tools**

19. The old IOSEA website had to be closed due to security concerns. The Secretariat created the new IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU website, which is part of the CMS website and can be accessed via: <https://www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en>. Some content types, such as archives of the monthly profiles published in the past, still need to be made available.
20. The old website contained numerous online tools, such as a bibliography, electronic library and flipper tag database. Due to infestation with malware and, for some tools, outdated technology, the online tools from the old website became dysfunctional and could not be transferred directly to the new website. Their transfer requires additional IT assistance, and in some cases has major implications for workload and costs.
21. In order to prioritize the use of resources, the Secretariat prepared a questionnaire, which was sent to members the AC and Signatories soliciting input on priority website tools which should be restored and transferred first. This resulted in the following order of priority: 1. Bibliography, 2. Electronic library, 3. Project database, 4. List of flipper tag series, 5. Satellite tracking meta-database, 6. Flipper tag recovery database, and 7. Genetic directory. Currently work is in progress to restore the bibliography, which in future will combine the bibliography and electronic library, and the flipper tag databases covering also recoveries, but progress is slow due to very limited availability of staff time and resources to address these specialised IT issues.
22. Upon the recommendation by the previous Coordinator, the Secretariat decided to recreate the dysfunctional questionnaire for country reports as a new national reporting form in the CMS Online Reporting system, which can be accessed at: <http://cms-ort.production.linode.unep-wcmc.org>. After the system had been tested, the Secretariat sent log-in details and instructions to all Signatories, and provided support in handling the new system as needed. Twenty national reports were received in time for inclusion in the analysis (Doc.7.1). All reports received have been made available as Inf.7.1.

## Outreach

23. The Secretariat was able to participate in two symposia of the International Sea Turtle Society (ISTS), in 2017 in Las Vegas, United States of America, and in 2018 in Kobe, Japan. These symposia provided excellent opportunities to meet researchers and conservationists working on marine turtles globally, including the IOSEA region, and thus build the professional network of the new Coordinator. The regional meetings taking place in advance of the symposia provided further opportunities to connect with those most relevant for the MOU.
24. While it was not feasible for the Secretariat to attend the 2019 symposium of the ISTS, a pre-recorded joint presentation with CITES on the findings of their study of illegal trade (see Inf.10.1.a) was presented by AC Member, Manjula Tiwari in the IOSEA and Africa regional meetings.
25. The Coordinator further participated in two symposia of the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA), in 2017 in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, and in 2019 in Moka, Mauritius. At both symposia, special sessions on marine turtles were co-organized with Sea Sense. The morning sessions were open to all participants and attended by a good number of people in addition to those attending the closed WIO-MTTF meetings in the afternoon (see above). The Coordinator gave a presentation on the MOU and its objectives on both occasions. The WIOMSA symposium presents an excellent opportunity to connect with researchers and conservationists working on marine turtles and their habitats in this important region.
26. Attendance at both the ISTS and WIOMSA symposia was also counted as training days for the Coordinator. Every year all UN staff must spend a minimum of five days investing in training related to competencies required in the position.

## Facilitating Information Exchange

27. Signatory States, AC members and IOSEA Illegal Trade Working group members were encouraged to contribute information which they wished to share through the IOSEA website. Several articles were published on the website as a result.
28. In September 2018 the Secretariat organized and conducted a conference call with the AC to consult it on various matters, including the status of ongoing work in preparation of MOS8 documents. The notes of the conference call are available upon request.
29. The relocation of the office to Bonn has resulted in a significant increase in consultation and information flow within the CMS Secretariat. Many of the issues that the CMS Aquatic Species Team deals with are highly relevant for marine turtles, and making full use of these synergies is beneficial for both the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and CMS. For an overview of the most relevant topics CMS is working on, please refer to Doc.10.4.

## Inter-agency Cooperation

30. As mentioned above, in 2018, the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU team of the CMS Secretariat collaborated with the CITES Secretariat in implementing CITES Decisions 17.222 and 17.223 on Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and other marine turtles (Cheloniidae and Dermochelyidae). See section *Illegal Take and Trade* above for further details.
31. The CMS/IOSEA Secretariat provided input to the development of Ramsar resolution XIII.24 on marine turtles, adopted in 2018. The IOSEA Secretariat discussed with the

AC the possibilities of enhancing cooperation with Ramsar, for example, by assisting countries in enhancing marine turtle conservation by nominating coastal Ramsar sites and developing management plans that include marine turtle considerations. For further information, please refer to Doc.10.2.