



Proposed Changes to the Terms of Reference of the Western Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force

The establishment of the Western Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force (WIO-MTTF) was a major step forward for the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU. The idea had emerged from a regional marine turtle workshop held in Kenya in September 2004, and draft terms of reference were agreed at the 4th Meeting of the Signatory States (MOS4) in 2006. Through a decision taken at a 2007 intergovernmental meeting in Johannesburg, a Western Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force (WIO-MTTF) was established under the Nairobi Convention, in partnership with the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU. The Task Force was thus set up as a joint initiative of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and the Nairobi Convention, which aims to protect East Africa's marine environment.

Since then, the WIO-MTTF has held eight meetings (details [here](#)). It has proven to be an extremely useful forum for exchange in the sub-region, and has helped countries to play an active role in the MOU.

In recent years, due to lack of funding for meetings and problems in finding new leadership for the WIO-MTTF when the chair needed to step down, the WIO-MTTF has not been able to live up to its full potential. With the recent withdrawal of the vice-chair, too, it has become very urgent to resolve these matters.

In discussion between former leadership of the WIO-MTTF and the Secretariat, and looking also to other similar bodies under other instruments of the CMS Family, it was agreed that it would be useful to review the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Task Force (available for this meeting as [Inf.5](#)).

In particular, such a revision would seek to address the following issues:

1) Leadership

At present, the ToR foresee that the Task Force “*will elect its own Chair and Vice-Chair on a three-year rotational basis*”. There has been hesitation amongst the membership to take on the role of Chair, while several members have indicated their willingness to serve as Vice-Chair. Further, the three-year rotation foreseen in the ToR does not match well with the frequency of Task Force meetings, and puts much pressure on all Members.

In order to address these problems, the revised ToR contained in Annex 1 to this document propose the appointment of two Co-Chairs, who would share responsibilities equally. Further, the terms of office are proposed to be connected to the number of meetings, and not be rotational, but by (re-)nomination and (re-)election.

2) Membership

The ToR state that “*Task Force members should serve for three years (i.e. through two regular Meetings of the Task Force and Signatory States), and should be eligible for re-nomination and reappointment at subsequent Meetings.*” This provision has proven impractical, both because neither MTTF nor Signatory State Meetings have taken place as regularly as originally foreseen, and because the membership of the MTTF is by nomination from the Signatory States, making it impossible to decide on it during the MTTF Meetings.



Accordingly, the revised ToR contained in Annex 1 propose a review of membership by means of a written consultation of Signatory States by the Secretariat, in advance of in-person meetings of the Task Force.

3) Relationship with the Nairobi Convention

The current ToR are based on the understanding that the Task Force is a joint body of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and the Nairobi Convention. In practical terms, however, the IOSEA Secretariat has been taking care of all aspects of the Task Force's management that are within a Secretariat's responsibility. The revised draft Terms of Reference in Annex 1 therefore propose that only the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU Secretariat serves as secretariat for the Task Force.

Further, the establishment of this joint Task Force has regrettably not resulted in regular institutional exchange, such as regular participation of both Secretariats in the meetings of the Task Force, or issuing of invitations to the IOSEA Secretariat to participate, or identify an expert to participate, in relevant meetings of the Nairobi Convention.

This revision of the ToR is therefore a good opportunity to rethink the relationship of the two agreements in connection with the WIO-MTTF. There is no doubt that the Task Force can and should continue "*to serve explicitly to facilitate implementation of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU (including its Conservation and Management Plan) in the sub-region, at the same time fulfilling the general programme of work of the Nairobi Convention within its broader scope of management of East Africa's coastal and marine environment*".

Fulfilling this mandate clearly requires regular exchange between the instruments. Participants views will be sought on how this can best be achieved.

4) Ex-Officio Members and Observers

The ToR foresee the inclusion in the Task Force of "*Ex-officio members from selected international nongovernmental organizations (e.g. IUCN, WIOMSA, WCS, WWF)*", as well as the participation of "*Observers from other relevant organizations contributing to or affecting marine turtle conservation (e.g. ASCLME, IOTC, NEPAD, SWIOFC)*". There is no description of the role of the *Ex-officio* members in the Task Force, and how it differs with respect to MTTF Members and observers.

In order to make the composition of the Task Force clear, and harmonize it with the terminology in use in other multilateral environmental agreements, the proposed revised ToR suggest including a list of organizations that should always receive an invitation to attend as observers.

5) Objectives and Mandate of the MTTF

There has been some confusion regarding the role of the Task Forces versus the role of Sub-regional Focal Points. The revised draft ToR attempt to clearly define the mandate of the Task Force, and its objectives.

6) Tasks

Currently described as Mandates in the ToR, these have been relabelled and streamlined. Priorities identified in 2008 have been removed to allow for a new, unbiased discussion about tasks and priorities at the present time (this will likely take place at a subsequent meeting of the Task Force).



Meeting participants are invited to carefully review the draft Terms of Reference presented below and discuss any observations and comments during the meeting. Afterwards, the Secretariat will prepare a revised version and send it to the Focal Points of the Signatory States for approval.

Draft Terms of Reference for the Western Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force

1. Introduction

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) sub-region comprises the following Signatory States: Comoros, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United Republic of Tanzania. Somalia is the only country in the sub-region that is not yet a Signatory State to the MOU.

The WIO region hosts five species of marine turtle (Green, Hawksbill, Leatherback, Loggerhead and Olive Ridley) and multiple life stages of each 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. Therefore, strong cooperation among States in the WIO region is crucial for effective conservation.

Marine turtles in the WIO region face a multitude of threats including unsustainable exploitation for meat and eggs, 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, and natural predation.

This Task Force was set up as a joint initiative of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (hereafter: IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU)¹ and the Amended Nairobi Convention for the Protection, Management, and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Western Indian Ocean (hereafter: Nairobi Convention).²

2. Purpose and Objectives

The objective of the IOSEA Marine Turtle 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 Western Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force (WIO-MTTF) has been set up to promote implementation of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and its integral Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) in the WIO region. It recognises that the Nairobi Convention provides a useful political platform for raising the profile of marine turtle conservation issues in the region, while the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU offers a comprehensive conservation plan combined with effective monitoring of implementation.

¹ <https://www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en>

² <https://www.unep.org/nairobiconvention/>



The Task Force's role is one of technical support to the National Focal Points and the Sub-Regional Focal Point. 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 the governmental Focal Points to assist Signatory States in the implementation of the MOU.

3. Composition

The WIO-MTTF shall consist of members of all Signatory States in the WIO region. Members will be nominated by each Signatory State, using a form provided by the Secretariat. In their nominations, Signatory States should choose experts knowledgeable of the ongoing research and conservation issues in the country, and are invited to consider in their nominations 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 IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU 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 two Co-Chairs from among its members. The Co-Chairs' terms of office span [xx] meetings, after which a new election will be called for. The Co-Chairs are eligible for re-election. They shall be the principal point of contact between the Task Force, IOSEA 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 of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU shall be informed of each planned meeting and invited to attend as observers.

The following organizations shall be invited to participate in each regular Task Force meeting:

- African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD)³
- Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)⁴
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)⁵
- Nairobi Convention⁶
- Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission (SWIOFC)⁷
- The Nature Conservancy (TNC)⁸
- Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)⁹
- Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA)¹⁰
- WWF¹¹

³ <https://www.nepad.org/>

⁴ <https://iotc.org/>

⁵ <https://www.iucn.org/>

⁶ <https://www.unep.org/nairobiconvention/>

⁷ <http://www.fao.org/fishery/rfb/swiofc/en>

⁸ <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/africa/>

⁹ <https://www.wcs.org/our-work/regions/eastern-africa-madagascar-and-western-indian-ocean>

¹⁰ <https://www.wiomsa.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/>



Additional observers, including invited experts, may be proposed by Task Force Members to the Co-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 IOSEA Advisory Committee, if necessary.

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

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

[A quorum shall be complete when members from at least [X] countries are present in a meeting.]

The members of the Task Force shall communicate the implementation of the regional work programme to the Co-Chairs of the Task Force, who shall provide updates on the activities and implementation of the regional work programme of the Task Force to the IOSEA Secretariat as well as to each of the Meetings of Signatory States.

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 other related meetings, such as the Meetings of IOSEA Signatory States, [the meeting of Nairobi Convention Focal Points], or other relevant meetings or conferences organized in the WIO sub-region.

One or both of the Co-Chairs should endeavour to participate in the relevant meetings of the MOU's Signatory States and the Nairobi Convention, and may also participate in the meetings of related and associated agreements and organisations. Other members are also encouraged to attend as observers.

7. Tasks

Taking into account the priorities set by Signatory States in the Work Programme for the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU, the Task Force shall:

Strengthen regional cooperation and coordination

- Serve as the coordinating and advisory body on marine turtle conservation to Signatories from the WIO sub-region.



- 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.
- Support the implementation of the goals of both the Nairobi Convention and the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU.
- 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 (aquaria) 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 subregional 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 Nairobi Convention and IOSEA CMP.
- Work with National Committees to ensure national planning is compatible with marine turtle conservation planning across the region.
- Obtain government and convention 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 WIO Marine Turtle Task Force 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 IUCN, WIOMSA, WCS, WWF, SWIOFC, and IOTC.
- 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.

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 activities of the WIO-MTTF will take place in consultation with the Secretariat of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU, and will seek additional resources, opportunities and frameworks.