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CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL
Bergen, 17-18 November 2011

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON MARINE TURTLES
Bergen, 17 November 2011, 14:30-18:30 hrs.

1. Introduction by the Appointed Councillor for Turtles / Round of Introductions by Participants

Welcome to working group by Colin Limpus, Appointed Councillor for Turtles (Australia).

Participants:

Three countries were represented: India, Israel and Senegal
Prakiti Srivastava (India)
Eliezer Frankenberg (Israel)
Djibril Diouck (Senegal)
Donna Kwan (UNEP/CMS Office – Abu Dhabi)

The Appointed Councillor expressed disappointment that Scientific Councillors from only three countries out of 82 Scientific Councillors attending ScC17 considered it important enough to participate in the Working Group on Turtles. Such poor participation by councillors from the signatory states made it difficult to ensure that discussions were representative of national, regional and global issues. Limited participation by range states would result in inadvertent biases in the discussion.

2. Conservation Status of Appendix I Species (ScC17/Doc.7/Rev.1)

- Review comments on UNEP/CMS/Res.10.23

All six Appendix I species had been red listed by IUCN. In the most recent review, IUCN had changed the red listing status for one species: Olive ridley turtle, *Lepidochelys olivacea*, which had been changed from "endangered" to "vulnerable".

It was difficult to apply the IUCN red listing status unilaterally within each species of marine turtles for each stock throughout the global distribution. Each species, except for *Lepidochelys kempii*, consisted of multiple independent genetic stocks (management units) which did not necessarily have equal conservation status.

There were two CMS instruments with their associated conservation and management plans that addressed marine turtles:

- MOU concerning Conservation Measures for Marine Turtles of the Atlantic Coast of Africa (western coast of Africa).
- MOU on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA) (Coastal Indian Ocean and eastern Asia from Australia and Papua New Guinea north to Japan.

There were also at least three other major non-CMS instruments which functioned to partially fill gaps in other regions:

- Inter-American Convention (IAC) (Eastern Pacific and western Atlantic countries of north, central and south America, including Caribbean countries).
- South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) Turtle Action Plan (Pacific Island nations).
- Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention: Mediterranean countries).

Significant gaps/deficiencies in conservation actions for marine turtles were most pronounced within the oceanic habitats of the North and South Atlantic Oceans, North and South Pacific Oceans and Indian Ocean. There was also a deficiency in countries on opposite sides of ocean basins collaborating in the conservation management of the common stocks that encompassed entire ocean basins, for example: loggerhead turtles across the South Pacific; Leatherbacks across the Atlantic. Addressing this deficiency was recommended as a priority for collaborative action among CMS signatories. Within the context of existing and proposed resolutions, there was an urgent need to reduce fisheries bycatch in coastal gill net, trawling and pelagic longline fisheries, to reduce mortality from ingestion of and entanglement in marine debris, and to undertake collaborative research and monitoring.

For green, loggerhead, hawksbill, olive ridley and leatherback turtles:

- On a global scale within each species, some management units (stocks) were severely depleted and showing no signs of recovery while some management units had increasing populations in response to strong local conservation actions.
- There was an immediate need for strong conservation within and among all signatory states bordering tropical and temperate oceans.

Loggerhead turtles:

- The North Pacific and the South Pacific management units for loggerhead turtles were under severe threat and urgent conservation action across these ocean basins was urged. The major threats included coastal development; fisheries bycatch mortality in coastal fisheries and in pelagic longline fisheries bycatch mortality and ingestion of synthetic debris.

Kemps Ridley turtles:

- While still listed as critically endangered, this species was now showing strong recovery because of long-term, collaborative actions by the American range states, particularly USA and Mexico (IAC Signatory States).

Olive Ridley turtles:

- IUCN had recently changed the Red Listing status from “endangered” to “vulnerable”, primarily because of strong recovery of the nesting populations of the Eastern Pacific. In contrast, the large Indian nesting population(s), while subject to some strong conservation management, still had significant problems with respect to fisheries

bycatch mortality and loss of eggs on nesting areas. While there were reports that the large Indian population did not show signs of increasing, community participation and publicity had been effective in engaging community participation in conservation actions on small nesting populations in addition to the large nesting populations in Orissa. Substantial scientific data were required to establish the population trend with such large nesting populations as occur with the Orissa *L. olivacea* arrabadas.

Leatherbacks turtles:

- The Eastern Pacific Ocean management units for the leatherback turtles were under severe threat and urgent conservation actions across these ocean basins are needed. The major threats included Fisheries bycatch mortality, coastal development and loss of eggs on nesting beaches.
- Within the Indian Ocean, there were strong concerns for the small remaining populations breeding in Sri Lanka, India (Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and south western Indonesia.

Recommendation regarding Resolution 10.16:

As an alternative to developing additional new marine turtle conservation instruments under CMS, it was recommended that CMS explore the development of formal partnerships with non-CMS instruments, such as IAC, SPREP and other relevant instruments, to enhance information exchange and the development of collaborative, cross-ocean-basin actions for conservation of shared turtle populations. It was recommended that these partnerships be developed jointly for both CMS and for its daughter MoUs in West Africa and IOSEA.

It was recommended that the Appointed Councillor for Turtles be included in the CMS team developing and implementing these cross-ocean-basin partnerships.

3. Res.10.23: Concerted and Cooperative Actions (ScC17 Agenda Item 17.1 and 17.2)

- Review and, if necessary, comment on *UNEP/CMS/Resolution 10.23* (Colin Limpus)
- Nomination of focal points for Concerted Action species
- Recommendations on further implementation of Concerted Actions

The focal point for reporting concerted actions for marine turtles was currently the Appointed Councillor, reporting collectively for all species. Each species had a global distribution with in excess of 130 range states for most species. The Working Group considered that it would be more appropriate within the context of CMS administration for there to be independent reporting for each of four regions: the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian Oceans and the Mediterranean Sea.

Recommendation regarding Resolution 10.23:

While recognizing the poor representation in the Working Group from CMS Signatory States in providing this advice, it was recommended that reporting on marine turtles be prepared on a regional basis for each ocean basin and Mediterranean Sea by regional Scientific Council representatives or by the secretariats of relevant CMS MoUs and other instruments, with the Appointed Councillor providing a global collation and overview.

4. Briefing on Key Intersessional Activities of the CMS Family

- Activities of IOSEA MOU (*UNEP/CMS/Inf.10.18.06*)

It was noted that no Briefing of the activities of the West African MoU was available. A briefing on IOSEA MoU has been prepared.

Recommendation:

CMS Secretariat was requested to produce a summary report of the status and functioning of the West African Turtle MoU.

5. Any Other Business

a) The Appointed Councillor reported on the negative impact of protracted and widespread extreme weather events of the 2010-2011 summer on coastal habitats of eastern Australia and the consequential impacts on marine turtle and dugong mortality and population dynamics.

b) Recommendations

1. That CMS Secretariat explore opportunities to address shared issues in marine conservation actions. For example, capitalizing on the synergies:

- within the CMS MoUs for Dugong, marine turtles and cetaceans and SPREP in the Pacific Ocean.
- within the CMS MoUs for West Africa small cetaceansand manatees, Dugong and West African Turtles.
- for cross-cutting issues such as Resolutions on sustainable use, fisheries bycatch, marine debris and marine turtle MoUs.

2. That CMS Secretariat support a project for WCMC to reactivate the global mapping tool previously developed for displaying the distribution and abundance by nesting beaches for each species of marine turtle, displaying the temporal trend in population numbers at representative index beaches and the migration data linking breeding and foraging areas.

- The database should be expanded to include the extensive existing information on breeding distribution and abundance of marine turtles throughout West African range states.
- The database could be substantially improved by inclusion of satellite telemetry data describing migratory pathways.

It was noted that this database had been structured to accommodate data for any migratory taxon with aggregated breeding, including pinnepeds, birds or bats.

c) Parties were urged to encourage turtle biologists and managers within their jurisdiction to attend annual International Sea Turtle Symposia and use these opportunities to organize regional meetings to promote and enhance international collaboration in delivery of CMS objectives.