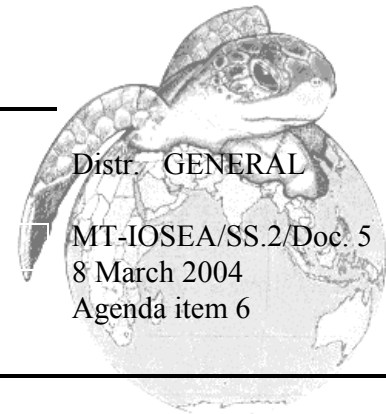

Memorandum of Understanding on the
Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and
their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia



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

REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

1. The present report covers the activities of the Secretariat, from the date of its establishment in early April 2003 until the end of February 2004. The main issues covered include: establishment of the Secretariat, circulation of documents, depositary functions, recruitment of Signatory States, substantive activities undertaken and planned, efforts to secure additional staff, and organisation of the present meeting.

Establishment of the Secretariat

2. The negotiation conference held in Manila in June 2001 agreed by consensus to accept an offer from the United Nations Environment Programme to co-locate the MoU Secretariat with the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (UNEP/ROAP), in Bangkok. The interim secretariat -- then provided by the UNEP/CMS Secretariat in Bonn, Germany -- reported to the First Meeting of Signatory States on the procedures to establish and fill the post of Coordinator/Senior CMS Advisor. Between February and March 2003, the arrangements to formally establish the secretariat in Bangkok were finalised, and the office became operational as of 8 April 2003.

3. Although the office had to be set up from scratch, the transition from interim secretariat to Secretariat was remarkably smooth, thanks in part to the fact that all of the existing paper files and computer equipment could be transferred from Bonn. Administrative induction, conversion to a new e-mail system (Lotus Notes) and word-processing software (MS-Word), and setting up of a new filing system were among the first time-consuming tasks to deal with.

4. Integration within the UNEP Regional Office and the UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asian and the Pacific) administration was similarly free of difficulty. Indeed, the fact that the integration proceeded so effortlessly made it possible to accomplish a large number of activities over the past 10-11 months, and is a vindication of the decision of the Signatory States to co-locate the secretariat with an existing United Nations body. The Secretariat takes this opportunity to extend its sincere appreciation to all those who have contributed to this successful transition.

Circulation of documents

5. The report of the First Meeting of Signatory States (reproduced as document MT-IOSEA/SS.2/Inf.3) was circulated to participants and other interested parties at the end of February 2003. That the report could be finalised within a month of the conclusion of the meeting is thanks in large measure to the excellent rapporteur services provided by the Australian delegation, for which the Secretariat is most grateful. The detailed Annotated Conservation and Management Plans for three of the MoU's four sub-regions (South-East Asia + Australia; Northern Indian Ocean, and Western Indian Ocean)

were edited and circulated in May 2003. No annotated CMP was prepared for the Northwestern Indian Ocean owing to insufficient information, a situation that hopefully will be rectified soon.

Depositary Functions

6. The text of the Memorandum of Understanding, including the Conservation and Management Plan (CMP), has been circulated and posted on the IOSEA MoU Website in the three official languages: Arabic, English and French. The Secretariat has also secured unofficial translations of the MoU and CMP texts in Farsi (Persian), Khmer and Vietnamese and has made these available on the website. A Thai translation is expected to be posted there shortly.

7. The Secretariat wishes to draw attention to a minor typographical error that it detected in the third programme of Objective 3 of the CMP. Whereas Programme 3.3 currently reads: "Analyse data to support mitigation of threats and to assess and improve conservation *politics*" (emphasis added), a review of the documents from the Manila negotiation session indicates that the final word of that heading should have been "practices". This error has also found its way into the official French translation of the Conservation and Management Plan (i.e. *politiques* instead of "pratiques"). It is not known whether or not the Arabic version is affected. The Secretariat seeks the consensus of the Meeting to correct this minor error in all language versions to be circulated in the future.

Recruitment of Signatory States

8. In the 13 months that have elapsed since the First Meeting of Signatory States, the Memorandum of Understanding has taken effect in a further four Range States: Cambodia (1 March 2003); Madagascar and Seychelles (1 April 2003); and Bangladesh (1 January 2004). This brings to 16 the number of States participating in the MoU. Representatives of as many as 3 or 4 additional Range States are expected to sign the Memorandum of Understanding on the occasion of the present meeting.

Substantive activities undertaken and planned

9. Much of the work of the Secretariat in the first months of its existence centred on the development of an informative and attractive website, which is described in more detail in document MT-IOSEA/SS.2/Doc. 8. Related activities included the preliminary development of an electronic library, a database of regional projects, and the compilation of a contact list of 250-300 relevant organisations. The website is updated regularly -- hosting news stories, profiles and other features from around the region. The United Kingdom's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) provided the start-up grant that made this work possible.

10. A productive collaboration with the Cambridge-based UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre culminated in the launch, in February 2004, of the IOSEA Marine Turtle Interactive Mapping System (also known as IMapS). Details of the system, which marries UNEP-WCMC's expertise in web-based database applications to extensive information collected by Dr. Colin Limpus and other colleagues over three decades, are given in the attachment to this paper.

11. The Secretariat has also devoted considerable energy to developing an electronic template for the submission of national reports, based on the reporting format agreed at the first meeting. This is being developed as a series of modules, with more sophisticated analytical tools expected to follow later in 2004. When fully functional, this online reporting tool is expected to be an exemplary model for other similar agreements.

12. The IOSEA MoU was represented at a number of meetings attended by the Coordinator over the past year, including the Bellagio Workshop on the Conservation of Pacific Sea Turtles (November 2003), which examined *inter alia* the possibility of extending or replicating the IOSEA MoU's

coverage in the Pacific Ocean. More recently, the Secretariat participated in the 24th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation (San Jose, Costa Rica, February 2004). The Coordinator made a formal presentation on the IOSEA MoU to the plenary, co-chaired the session on “Global and regional initiatives”, and led an informal discussion of the MoU with interested NGOs.

13. Attempts to secure additional human resources for the Secretariat (reported in the next section) were also an important preoccupation over the past year, along with efforts to mobilise the members of the Advisory Committee to begin their work under the chairmanship of Dr. Colin Limpus (Australia).

14. It is important to note that under the arrangement whereby the Convention on Migratory Species makes a significant annual contribution to the IOSEA MoU, a proportionate percentage of the Co-ordinator’s time is devoted to general CMS activities on a regional level. Many of these have no direct relation to the IOSEA MoU, though there may be positive ancillary benefits from the contacts that are established. These activities have included, for example, representing CMS in a global initiative of UNEP to introduce guidelines on compliance and enforcement of Multilateral Environmental Agreements; promoting the parent Convention in a workshop for Pacific Island countries; and representing CMS interests in a parallel memorandum of understanding for Siberian cranes and a major GEF wetlands project. Balancing the CMS and IOSEA work will continue to be a challenge, but hopefully will be easier in the coming year if some much needed assistance materialises.

Efforts to secure additional staff

15. As part of its offer made in 2001 to host the MoU Secretariat, UNEP indicated it would endeavour to source a second staff member for the Secretariat through its Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programme, primarily to assist the Coordinator, as well as carrying out other duties for the UNEP/ROAP office, on a time-share basis. Unfortunately, although the post apparently was advertised amongst others in the same JPO recruitment scheme programme, no Government expressed an interest in financing the position.

16. To try to compensate for this deficit, in early 2003 the Coordinator made contact with a programme of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), which places volunteers (so-called Youth Ambassadors) abroad. A proposal was conceived for a volunteer to assist the Secretariat in the area of information management, especially with a view to enhancing the involvement of developing countries in the MoU. AusAID accepted the proposal, in principle, in September 2003 for placement of a candidate for a period of one year, from mid-March 2004. Since then, negotiations have taken place to try to conclude an agreement between AusAID and the United Nations on the terms of the placement. At the time of writing, these discussions had yet to be finalised and the final outcome is by no means certain. The Secretariat hopes to have a positive development to report to the meeting.

17. Apart from this, there appear to be good opportunities in Bangkok for recruitment of short-term interns, for periods of about 3 months, which have yet to be explored in depth only because of lack of time.

18. At the end of January, the Secretariat managed to secure a temporary assistant to help with the logistical preparation of the present meeting. This arrangement will end in early May 2004, with limited scope for prolongation, under the existing terms of recruitment. It is clear, however, that a longer term solution for secretarial support must be found if the work of the Secretariat is to advance efficiently. While considerable progress has been made in the first year of operation, several substantive areas could not be explored simply because resources had to be devoted to more basic administrative tasks.

Organisation of the present meeting

19. It was decided to hold the present meeting in March 2004 to avoid conflict with the meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Annual Sea Turtle Symposium, both taking place in February. Announcements were circulated in mid-December 2003. For the most part, the Secretariat has had to rely on e-mail communication and regular reminders to inform potential participants about the meeting. While, in the end, the result may be satisfactory – judging from the level of registrations for the present meeting – even more interest could be generated if there were more capacity to advertise the meeting more demonstrably. This would help to create more awareness among senior decision-makers about the importance of the issues to be discussed at such meetings, and ensure effective representation from as many Range States as possible.

Work programme for the year ahead

20. In certain respects, the work programme of the Secretariat will be shaped by the outcomes of the present meeting, and will depend on the decisions taken with respect to a number of agenda items (for example, the creation of a site network linked to the MoU, the possible extension of the coverage of the agreement, etc.). In addition to these, however, some core activities can be identified already which will demand attention, notably:

- Further development of the IOSEA website (discussed in more detail in document MT-IOSEA/SS.2/Doc. 8), particularly from the standpoint of adding information to existing features and developing some new applications;
- More sophisticated processing and analysis of the national reports, to facilitate identification of gaps in implementation;
- Overseeing the proper implementation of a number of projects funded by CMS/IOSEA;
- More proactive awareness-raising among decision-makers not only in Signatory States, but also in non-Signatory Range States to encourage membership, as well as other States with an interest in the MoU – taking more advantage of synergies arising from the co-location arrangement with the UNEP Regional office.
- Promoting and facilitating the establishment of sub-regional co-ordination mechanisms where these do not already exist, through increased contact with selected intergovernmental bodies;
- Developing closer linkages with non-governmental organisations, particularly those whose activities span several countries in the region;
- Developing new ties with regional fisheries bodies that have a critical role to play in managing the serious problem of incidental catch of marine turtles.

Action requested / Expected outcome:

Signatory States are invited to note the report of the Secretariat; to agree by consensus to authorise the typographical amendment to the Conservation and Management Plan cited in paragraph 7 above; and to reflect on activities they wish to see included in the Secretariat's work programme in the coming year, and underpinned by sufficient resources for implementation.