

REPORT OF THE 8TH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Da Nang, Viet Nam
16-18 October 2019**



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

All information relating to the 8th Meeting of the Advisory Committee of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU is available at <https://www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en/meeting/AC8>.

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Report of the 8th Meeting of the Advisory Committee

1. Welcoming Remarks

1. Jack Frazier, the Chair, opened the meeting and conducted a tour de table. He pointed out that there was a heavy agenda and hoped that at the end of the meeting, the Advisory Committee would be able to present concrete advice to the Meeting of Signatories.

2. Admission of Observers and Adoption of Agenda

2. The Sub-Regional Focal Points had been invited to participate in this meeting. Also present were representatives of South Africa and Viet Nam. The Chair warmly welcomed the observers and encouraged them to participate actively in discussions. A list of participants is contained in Annex 1.
3. The Chair said that the agenda had been circulated and asked whether there were any proposals for amending it. There were no interventions, so the agenda was adopted as presented. The final agenda is contained in Annex 2.

3. Summary of the Objectives and Outcomes of the 7th Meeting of the IOSEA Signatory States (MOS7), September 2014

4. The Chair called upon the Secretariat to give an overview of the main outcomes of the 7th Meeting of the Signatories (MOS7).
5. Heidrun Frisch-Nwakanma (Secretariat) said that the main issues discussed had been the Site Network, illegal take and trade, genetic stocks, socio-economic and cultural implications of turtle conservation, fisheries interactions and the assessments of Leatherback and Loggerhead Turtles.
6. Referring to MOS8/Doc.7.2 [Report on Implementation of Action Points](#), she said that 35 Action Points had been agreed by MOS7. The Advisory Committee (AC) was the lead or joint lead for many of them, and 18 had been started or completed.
7. Progress had been made with the Site Network, capacity-building, work on genetics, the Hawksbill Turtle assessment, environmental impact assessments, fisheries interactions, sub-regional coordination, the website and related tools, and illegal taking and trade, for which a working group had been set up. Many of these items would be considered in detail under their own agenda items in this meeting and the Meeting of the Signatories, and documents containing the main points had been prepared.
8. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma next drew attention to MOS8/Doc.8.1 [Synthesis of Existing Recommendations](#), which had been prepared by Polina Orlinkiy, the Secretariat's consultant. The document contained not only the Action Points of MOS7, but also a collation of all recommendations of recent years to ensure that none of the important discussions of the past were forgotten. It was not proposed to examine this document in any great depth, but rather to use it as a reference source. Incomplete action points would be carried forward into the new work programme.
9. The Chair asked whether anyone that had attended MOS7 wanted to add anything to this account of the meeting.

10. Colin Limpus (AC Member) congratulated Ms Frisch-Nwakanma for her efforts in keeping the work of the Memorandum on track after the prolonged hiatus due to staffing.
11. Kongkiat Kittiwattanawong (Thailand / Sub-Regional Focal Point for South-East Asia) said that it had been the intention to hold a sub-regional meeting, but this had proved impossible. Some activities on training and conferences had been organized, but these events had had a wider focus beyond marine turtles.

4. Review of Past Work of the Advisory Committee and its Members since MOS7

12. The Chair invited members to mention any highlights.
13. Ronel Nel (AC Member) said that a proposed project on pollution covering six countries had failed to attract funding. The project could, however, still proceed in part if broken down into its components.
14. The Chair said that an important task of the AC was to submit a list of priority actions to the MOS.

5. Overview of Arrangements for, and Objectives of the 8th Meeting of Signatory States (MOS8)

15. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma gave a presentation on MOS8, informing the AC that a revised agenda for the meeting had been posted just before this session.
16. The key document was the Draft Work Programme (MOS8/Doc.8.2), which had been drafted to cover the next five years, given the uncertainty over the timing of the next MOS. The Work Programme was intended as a guide to the Signatory States, the AC and the Secretariat with regard to priorities.
17. The Draft Work Programme had been prepared based on the Synthesis of Recommendations, carrying over those not completed, and had been drafted to reflect the priorities highlighted by the Signatory States in their national reports. The aim was to have a new work programme adopted at the end of the MOS that would ideally be both succinct and achievable. There were currently over 100 measures in the draft and this number should be reduced to a more manageable level. Each action should also be specific and clearly identify the entities responsible.
18. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma explained that much of the time for this AC Meeting had been set aside to allow the AC Members to work on the draft in detail, so that a revised draft could be presented to MOS8.

6. Clarification of the Role, Responsibilities, and Position of the Advisory Committee

19. Mr Limpus said that a problem had become apparent since the inception of the MOU, namely that its principal purpose was to enhance regional cooperation to help turtle conservation, so the focus was meant to be on international rather than national aspects. While there was a Marine Turtle Task Force for the Western Indian Ocean, the South-East Asia region had not yet established a Task Force. It was important to identify what the national responsibilities were and what actions were better conducted through regional cooperation. The latter would fall under the MOU.

20. The Chair agreed with Mr Limpus, saying that activities could be categorized as national, bilateral or regional, and there was an important role in the third category for the sub-regional coordinators.
21. Manjula Tiwari (AC Member) also agreed on the importance of international cooperation. She had organized a regional workshop, funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and stressed that coordination among National Focal Points and regional coordinators was essential. This workshop had also been promoted on the website of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU, and Ms Frisch-Nwakanma said the Secretariat gladly did so if it was informed of regional events.
22. Mr Limpus pointed out that staff changes within national administrations were often responsible for the loss of momentum, as people moved post or retired. New incumbents took time to familiarize themselves with the issues.
23. The Chair raised the issue of the Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) and expressed his view that it was overambitious. He recalled that the meeting where it was drafted was full of passion, but he considered it to have been a mistake not to have identified clear priorities given the limited resources available for implementation. The present meeting could decide what was important and what was achievable by deciding what would be included in the five-year Work Programme.
24. The Secretariat explained that the Draft Work Programme was structured following the CMP to ensure the link to this key document was clear. She felt that it was helpful to have a comprehensive plan, giving a broader description of the issues and an overview of all necessary actions.
25. The Chair posed the question of how the MOU could be implemented more effectively. There had been seven Meetings of the Signatories, and the commitment of the experts had not been matched with sufficient funding. He stressed that the roles of the Sub-Regional Focal Points and the Marine Turtle Task Forces were key, as they could bring more focus to work on the ground.
26. Ms Nel also recognized that the MOU had produced a huge list of tasks without corresponding financial resources being made available, but pointed out that a great deal of parallel work was being undertaken which was relevant to the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU. A broader definition of what constituted work under the MOU might be appropriate.
27. Melanie Virtue (Secretariat) said that in her experience of other MOUs under the Convention on Migratory Species, Signatories had adopted a comprehensive list of tasks before attempting to prioritize, taking into account national and regional needs. She agreed that a great deal of work was done in parallel and she was wary about CMS taking credit for the work of third parties, but would gladly recognize the contributions made outside the immediate workings of CMS instruments to the cause of species conservation.
28. Jeff Miller (AC Member) said that it was clear that communication in all directions was vital, at local, national and international levels.
29. Mr Limpus said that the role of the AC was to advise, not to determine policy. He had recently been approached by the Singapore National Park Authority after it had decided to engage in marine protection. While the sea area under Singaporean jurisdiction was relatively small (smaller than some bays in Australia), the approach had indicated that Singapore was interested in international cooperation.

30. Thuraiya Al Sariri (Oman / Sub-Regional Focal Point North-Western Indian Ocean) said that communication was hampered by staff changes and people not responding to emails. Even at the national level, there were conflicting priorities, while internationally countries in the same region were at different levels. It was also important to align the work of the MOU with other forums, such as those dealing with climate change, given its impact on marine ecosystems. Such synergies would save both financial resources and staff time.
31. Nguyen Thanh Binh (Viet Nam) said that interaction with fisheries made it indispensable that the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU work with bodies such as the South-East Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC).
32. The Chair said that the terms of reference of the AC stated that there could be ten members. In the past, one of the members had been involved in SEAFDEC, but his term of office had expired.
33. Mr Kittiwattanawong stressed that communication was essential, so that everyone could be aware of training opportunities when they arose. The available communications platforms should be used to the fullest. He said that there should be more sub-regional meetings, especially in advance of the MOS. He agreed that there were administrative problems, such as staff turnover, but it was essential that National Focal Points took the initiative in communicating.
34. At MOS7, Thailand had attempted to arrange regional work, but this had proved difficult with so few staff. The Secretariat was requested to write to Thailand and other South-East Asian countries to remind them of their role, as this might catalyse action nationally. Thailand was keen to play a role promoting conservation and the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU could facilitate this.
35. The Chair said that the Secretariat was there to assist, and Sub-Regional Focal Points could use it as a communications hub. Signatory States did not have to ask the Secretariat's permission to act but could ask for help. Informal meetings could be arranged in the margins of other forums. The Western Indian Ocean region worked in this way, taking advantage of the biennial meetings of the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association. This Marine Turtle Task Force operated fairly autonomously, and the role of the Secretariat was secondary.
36. Mr Binh suggested with regard to communications platforms that could be used by National Focal Points in the ASEAN region that SEAFDEC had its own mechanisms and the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU could seek a memorandum of cooperation with that organization. SEAFDEC also dealt with other species and habitats of interest to the CMS Family such as sharks, Dugongs and seagrass.
37. Mr Limpus pointed out that AC members were not national representatives but had been appointed because of their expertise. Ms Nel said that at the MOS she would be part of the South African national delegation, but would sit with the other AC members.
38. The Chair commented that such dual roles had been the cause of concern in the past, and care needed to be taken to avoid confusion as to who one was speaking for.

7. Overview of implementation of, and follow-up from, MOS7, and Work Programme for MOS8

39. The Chair proposed to run through the menu of activities and to consider what was needed to be done in each case, deciding what the priorities were and which activities could be deferred. He hoped that the outcome would be a realistic list of actions, with clearly identified actors, to be carried out over the next five years.

7.1. Analysis of National Reports

40. The Chair drew attention to MOS8/Doc.7.1 [Analysis of National Reports](#) which had been prepared by the Secretariat.
41. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma briefly presented the Secretariat's overview of the 20 national reports received before the deadline. Four more had been received afterwards and all 24 had been posted on the website as Information Documents. Unlike in previous years they had not been scored for quality of the answers, but had been examined to ascertain what had been achieved and the principal issues raised.
42. As this was the first time that this approach to analysing the national reports had been attempted, feedback from the AC was expressly invited. The tabular format was meant to help the reader understand the data presented. The MOS would also be asked for its opinion of the format. It was intended to resume a system of scoring the responses, but not on a 'name-and-shame' basis, so that each Signatory State could receive one-on-one feedback.
43. Mr Miller said that his task had been to interpret what the Signatory States had been communicating through their national reports regarding their capacity-building needs. He presented two sample pages of the analysis which he had prepared and sought the approval of the AC to proceed in this fashion with his report to the MOS. He also circulated a draft questionnaire, which he asked members of the AC to critique.
44. Of the 21 national reports he had been able to include in his analysis, most were data rich and of good quality. Some countries had not updated their data, so there were some gaps and some information had not been changed since 2010 or 2014. Five reports had been submitted late, so the analysis had been revised. He voiced some concern about presenting a report to the MOS based on incomplete and outdated information and therefore had doubts about the veracity of his analysis.
45. The key questions were what Signatory States needed, what the AC could do to help, and how best this assistance could be provided. Mr Miller noted that over the past five years, no Signatory States had approached him for advice, either regarding simple factual matters or for help in preparing project proposals. The skill sets available in the AC included training and development, data analysis, report preparation, review and evaluation and finding resources. National Focal Points should ensure that their national reports were updated and inform others about training opportunities.
46. He distributed the draft questionnaire on capacity-building for comment. It contained questions with a menu of 'tick box' answers ranging from 'very important' to 'not important' with a 'no opinion' option. If the format of the questionnaire was approved by the AC, he intended to circulate it and have it completed during the MOS. It was pointed out that some delegates would be attending the MOS for the first time and might not be very familiar with the workings of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and each respondent might interpret the questions or choice of responses differently.

47. The Chair noted that there was a parallel exercise under way to refine the Work Programme and asked whether Mr Miller was proposing a review of the national reporting format at the same time. Mr Miller said that he was addressing the task assigned to him of identifying training and capacity-building needs rather than analysing the whole national reports system. The specific focus of the questionnaire could be made clear in its title.
48. Mr Limpus said that he saw that two steps were required, but thought they could be better balanced. It was important to address bycatch and to provide the necessary training to help people address it. He asked whether the national reports should be revised to include the option of making explicit requests for assistance. The Secretariat confirmed that many of the national reports received had included requests for training and for assistance with capacity-building. Adding a specific point related to capacity-building and training needs in each section would be feasible. This could be achieved by adding a 'tick box' with set response or a free text section allowing Signatory States to describe their needs and the degree of urgency.
49. Ms Nel asked whether the primary aim was to improve the quality of the national report responses or to improve the capacity of Signatory States to deliver conservation. She said that as well as improving the amount of data collected on turtles, the effort required to achieve this goal should also be measured. The Chair said that he understood the aim was to gain a clearer impression of Signatory States' needs.
50. Mr Miller thought that the people completing the national reports came from different backgrounds, some being active in the field and others relying on reports prepared by others. Some might not have immediate access to the data upon which responses would be based, and if the information in the reports was not up to date they were of limited value. He presented an analysis of one section from the national reports, based on 20 responses.
51. Mr Limpus said that Signatory States' needs should be clear from their reports and that the Secretariat should not have to undertake a major exercise to extract the information.
52. Ms Al Sariri asked whether Signatory States could revise their national reports after submission, as she had received important information from another ministry. The Secretariat said that there was a degree of flexibility, and Signatory States could ask that their reports be returned for correction within the constraints of the deadlines for document production in the run-up to meetings.
53. The Chair asked whether it would make sense to add to national reports the option of including an assessment of the degree of confidence in the responses given.
54. Mr Miller said that some respondents had provided the source of particular pieces of information using citations, noting that more recent national reports had been better in this respect as a result of a suggestion made at MOS7.
55. Mr Limpus said that the species assessments would also identify issues affecting a range of countries, but the cycle of conducting the assessments was moving slowly, with work currently under way on the third of the series.
56. Ms Tiwari said that training sessions had been held in South-East Asia, led by Flora and Fauna International in Cambodia, where four countries had been asked about their needs. Monitoring and management of hatcheries had been mentioned. Ms Tiwari said that she would share the information with the AC.

57. Ms Al Sariri wondered why some Signatory States left answers blank and why some did not even submit a report. The Secretariat said that sometimes it was not informed of changes of personnel and the forms were therefore sent to people no longer dealing with the MOU. Some Signatory States encountered technical difficulties with the online report system. There was possibly a role for Sub-Regional Focal Points in contacting Signatory States to ensure that national reports were sent and to identify problems.

7.2. Hawksbill Turtle Assessment

58. Mark Hamann (AC Member) said that he had agreed to undertake the Hawksbill Turtle assessment five years ago. Work had been under way for two years, and the second draft had recently been completed. Feedback was now required. Some data were from the 1990s and Mr Hamann assumed that more recent information was available in most locations. There were no data from some countries (e.g. Somalia and Timor Leste) and efforts would be made to seek out more information from the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf.
59. Mr Limpus said that there was a role for Signatory States for which no recent data was published in clarifying which monitoring programmes were still in operation. He also called for a clear timeline for the assessment so it would be clear when it would be concluded, and when a start could be made on the next species.
60. In 1992, Japan had been pressured at the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) into lifting its reservation regarding Hawksbills. This should have led to a reduction in mortality. If nesting populations had risen, then this should have been acclaimed as a success for conservation actions through international cooperation. If the approach worked, it should be replicated.
61. Ms Tiwari said that some projects needed to publish their data first or were still progressing so final reports were not yet available. Mr Hamann said that such projects could be mentioned with the caveat that data were not complete.
62. The Chair suggested that the preliminary report be published in the Indian Ocean newsletter to solicit further input.

7.3. Casuarina Project

63. Ms Nel gave a presentation on the effects of *Casuarina* planting on coastal habitats, based on MOS8/Doc.7.4 [The Vulnerability of Casuarina-backed Sea Turtle Nesting Beaches to Erosion](#). An assessment had been made of beach vulnerability as a result of the planting of non-native *Casuarina* trees to combat sea level rise and storm activity. The objective was to determine whether planting the trees had a positive, neutral or negative effect on natural coastal habitat. The initial request for information had received a poor response, so the project team had resorted to using Google Maps.
64. In response to the 2004 tsunami, 180,000 trees had been planted in Tamil Nadu, India. Two species of *Casuarina* were used as these were hardy and well-adapted to coastal locations due to their tolerance of high salinity. *Casuarinas* were native to Australia but had become established throughout the tropics. Once established, they were hard to remove and native plants did not thrive in their shadow, which created knock-on effects on other biota such as small mammals and ground temperature. It was doubtful whether the trees contributed to stabilizing the coastline.

65. Three different scenarios for sea level rise developed by the IPCC had been examined and a data set covering 200 beaches had been built up. Few beaches were considered to be in the very vulnerable category and the presence of the trees was not indicative, but did have other effects. At some beaches *Casuarinas* were a problem, and despite having been planted to stop erosion, they were not having any effect and were a contributing adverse factor on several beaches where Olive Ridley Turtles nested.
66. Ms Tiwari said that she had the impression that *Casuarinas* were not having any great effect on some of the beaches in India with no visible tracts of *Casuarina* to be seen near the beaches. She suggested that representatives at the MOS be asked for their opinion.
67. Ms Nel said that it was not possible to assess the impact of *Casuarinas* by walking along the beach. More site data were needed but they were not being provided. Some anecdotal data were being provided, but Ms Nel was hesitant to undermine an otherwise robust study by giving them too much weight. She said that outside of their native range, there were better ways of protecting beaches than by planting *Casuarinas*, which had other negative effects. There was, however, no 'one size fits all' answer. South Africa had now begun to remove them.
68. Mr Limpus said that in areas where they were native, *Casuarinas* were not a monoculture. Native parakeets and beetles ate the seeds and helped control them. It was important not to plant trees without knowing how beach forest systems worked. He questioned the inclusion of Wreck Island, which had been a major hatchery until a fisheries-related crash and where *Casuarinas* had been present for a long time with no ill effects. The erosion at Cemetery Beach was related to a category-4 cyclone, and *Casuarinas* were probably not a major factor.

7.4. Environmental Impact Assessment

69. Ms Nel gave a presentation titled "the African Conundrum", which dealt with environmental impact assessments (EIAs), noting that so much development was taking place and capacity to regulate it differed from country to country. It was based on a short paper (MOS8/Doc.7.5 [Guidelines for the Review of Environmental Impact Assessments \(EIAs\) of Developments Impacting on Sea Turtles and Turtle Habitat](#)) and was meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.
70. Many countries undergoing rapid development were also rich in biodiversity (including marine turtles). Some developments with potentially significant impacts included: oil and gas exploration and exploitation (with major footprints beyond the immediate sites), tourism and sport, dredging and land reclamation.
71. The potential effect on marine turtles should automatically trigger an EIA as they were threatened species needing protection beyond designated sites. The complexities of marine turtle conservation arising from their life cycles meant that the footprint area of a project could be immense. Genetic stocks of a population were also important, especially for migratory species with multiple range states.
72. There was also the question of who was responsible for monitoring projects after they had been given permission to proceed. In some cases it was the government, and in others the developers. Whichever option was to be pursued, the division of responsibilities should be specified at the outset.
73. The main effects of projects were: habitat destruction, disturbance, mortality, artificial habitat change, altering behaviour and reduction of resilience (later effects, greater

- susceptibility to disease and climate change). Threats included air, water and light pollution, noise and vibration, ship strikes and habitat degradation.
74. Government intervention should be subject to certain triggers. Factors regarding water pollution were distance, currents and weather/storm dispersal. Distances of 0-20km were considered close, 20-100km intermediate and 100-200 km far. For light pollution the ranges were 0-10km, 10-20km and, 20-30 km. Red light seemed to be the most benign, but light in the range from yellow to blue could be harmful. Mitigation measures could be taken to make the horizon darker. Harm arising from noise and vibration was worst at 0-1km, diminishing at 1-2km and 2-4km. It was capable of making habitat unusable. There had been little consideration of the effects of air pollution on turtles, but the immediate zone was likely to extend to 1km with the buffer zone at 10km from the source. Vessel strikes could involve large cruise liners or small high-speed pleasure craft. The immediate footprint of habitat degradation and destruction was usually obvious, but there could be cumulative effects from developments reducing the connectivity of species and habitats.
 75. EIAs depended on management, mitigation and monitoring, but decisions were often made in a vacuum. In Australia, data from the previous five years were required to determine whether an area could be developed. Practice was less robust in many countries in Africa, where a site might be subject to a superficial examination.
 76. Mitigation measures could include installing 'bubble curtains' as barriers to noise. Consideration had to be given to the duration of mitigation measures and for which stages of a project (preparation, construction and operation) they would be needed. 'Choke' species could be imposed (e.g. if a certain number of a protected species were subject to bycatch in a given period, fisheries operations should be suspended).
 77. Consideration should be given to the restoration of damaged habitats and to the rehabilitation of injured animals.
 78. Education and public awareness should also be carried out and local communities should be engaged.
 79. Mr Limpus saw a weakness in current practice in leaving how monitoring and data analysis fed into the process to consultants without adequate peer review to ensure sound results. He said that while requiring five years' worth of data, as Australia did, was appropriate for some circumstances, 9-12 years would be preferable for nesting beaches, because turtles did not breed every year.
 80. Mr Hamann said that he had been asked to review EIAs that had been challenged when accusations had been made that they had been incorrectly carried out.
 81. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma referred to MOS8/Doc.11.2 [Impacts of Underwater Noise](#), which included the CMS *Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities*, which covered marine turtles among other species. The Guidelines had been adopted through CMS Resolution 12.14, but they had been broadly drawn to be applicable to all instruments of the CMS Family dealing with marine species. The guidelines had been widely welcomed with very positive feedback.
 82. Ms Al Sariri said that EIAs should require a site to be surveyed and should preferably require the adoption of a harmonized regional approach, especially where migratory species were affected.
 83. Ms Nel said that EIAs had to include effects on marine turtles, but these species rarely

received the attention that they deserved. The application of EIA regulations would be a good topic for a regional discussion. An upcoming issue were the new gas fields found off the coast of Mozambique, close to key feeding grounds of marine turtles. The entire life cycle of the species should be taken into account.

84. The Chair agreed that EIAs should consider marine turtles, but he was under no illusions about the power of the vested interests at play, such as that of oil and gas companies, which were multi-billion dollar industries. It could not be ruled out that consultants assessing projects were in the pay of the developers and therefore unlikely to act impartially.
85. Mr Kittiwattanawong said that tourism or coastal defence developments were subject to EIA and the presence of marine turtles was one of the trigger factors.

7.5. CITES Report on Marine Turtle Trade

86. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma introduced MOS8/Doc.10.1 [Illegal Take and Trade of Marine Turtles](#). Recently, CITES had set up a working group to develop specific proposals based on the report published as MOS8/Inf.10.1.a. MOS7 had also set up a working group on illegal trade, which needed a renewal of its mandate.
87. The question arose of how the process under the MOU should align with the work undertaken under CITES. Another consideration would be how policies would be implemented at national levels.
88. Mr Limpus had the impression that under CITES, focus was not on the places from where turtles were being taken, but rather on the markets where they were sold. He referred to MOS8/Inf.10.1.b [A Report on Turtle Harvest and Trade in Solomon Islands](#), which outlined a programme based on one previously formed for elephants and ivory and relied on recruiting local villagers for data collection. The local turtle take was allowed, but illicit trade was linked to the timber export trade, in which turtles were smuggled out. It was necessary to stop the trade of tortoise shell in the markets in countries such as Japan, as turtles would no longer be taken if there was no demand.
89. Mr Kittiwattanawong asked whether genetic tracing would help identify the source of turtle products.
90. Mr Limpus said that genetic tracing was possible for live turtles and meat. Turtles' breeding grounds were discrete but feeding grounds were mixed. It was less clear if shells could be used for DNA testing. Ms Tiwari confirmed that DNA testing could be done on items of jewellery.
91. Mr Kittiwattanawong asked whether there would be an opportunity to discuss genetics. In South-East Asia, greater cooperation was needed among countries rather than having each country operating in isolation. Using one trusted laboratory for testing would help standardization.
92. Ms Nel commented that CITES regulations were a barrier to transferring DNA material across borders for testing.
93. Mr Limpus stressed that the CITES Secretariat needed to focus on enforcement. At departure lounges at some international airports, CITES-restricted items were on sale beyond all the control gates.

7.6. Ramsar Resolution on Marine Turtles

94. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma introduced MOS8/Doc.10.2 [Ramsar Resolution XIII.24 on Marine Turtles: Relevance for the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU](#). The IOSEA Site Network included five Ramsar Sites, and in these the management plans took account of marine turtle interests. The dual designation opened possibilities for synergies with the Ramsar Convention.
95. Ms Nel asked whether the IOSEA Site Network was contributing any additional value rather than duplicating an existing designation system.
96. Ms Tiwari said that rules under the Ramsar Convention were strictly enforced and infringements were investigated when complaints were made.
97. Ms Virtue said that many site designation regimes existed, and it was not unusual for one locality to be eligible under more than one regime. Some designations were legally binding, such as World Heritage and Ramsar Sites, while others such as the IOSEA Site Network were not.
98. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma said that expertise under the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU could be made available to the Ramsar Convention in sites where marine turtles were part of the justification for designation.
99. Mr Limpus said that since the Ramsar Convention resolution, all federal and state agencies in Australia had reviewed sites to assess their importance for marine turtles.
100. Mr Kittiwattanawong said that ten Ramsar Sites contained turtle nesting beaches and added that such sites could automatically be considered for recognition in the IOSEA Site Network.

7.7. Revision of Site Network Process

101. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma said that revision of the Site Network process was one of the action points arising from MOS7. Ms Orlinskiy was in the process of finalizing a document for consideration at MOS8, outlining points that needed to be addressed.
102. There had been a long discussion at MOS7 about how workable and relevant the template was and there were still a number of open questions that would require considerable intersessional time to resolve. The aim should therefore be to agree on a process rather than to finalize the template.
103. The Chair said that a working group had been established at MOS7 and that Clara Nobbe, the interim coordinator, had organized three telephone conferences, in which he had participated along with representatives of Oman, the USA and the UK. There had been detailed discussion of the qualification criteria and the 75-point score to cross the threshold. Momentum had subsequently been lost, possibly in the hand-over back to the previous coordinator upon his return from his sabbatical. It was important to regain that lost momentum and address the concerns of the National Focal Points, who has insisted that the evaluation sheets were not workable.
104. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma said that she was aware of two outcomes, the first being the establishment of a working group to revise the template of the site evaluation sheets, which was meant to avoid lengthy iterations by seeking comprehensive site information

- at the outset. A second working group had been envisaged to seek funding to help implement the network, but this group appeared never to have become active. The Secretariat had no records of the discussions from the telephone conferences and sought guidance as to whether the second working group should be revived, and if so, with what terms of reference.
105. Ms Nel pointed out that some members of the working group had moved on to other positions and were no longer involved with the MOU. Ms Virtue said that the working group would have to be reconstituted as some key members were now no longer in post.
 106. Mr Hamann said clarity was needed on how to approve a revised application which had just fallen short of the threshold in its original form.
 107. Ms Tiwari said that the ten sites had been adopted into the Network, but it was not clear what happened next.
 108. The Chair said that the working group would need dedicated people to serve on it. It would have been preferable to retain the original members, but the representatives of the UK and USA had moved on to other duties. Holding face-to-face meetings would be time-consuming and expensive, but the business could be conducted by telephone conference or email correspondence. He also wished to conform as closely as possible to the original mandate from the Signatories, and suggested that representatives of Signatory States rather than the AC should lead.
 109. Ms Tiwari said that as she, Mr Hamann and Ms Nel had recently reviewed the latest site proposal from Viet Nam, they might be best placed to make progress with a draft. They volunteered to undertake a first review of the issues identified earlier before the MOS, and to suggest a process for finalising the revision of the documents there. This proposal was gratefully accepted.
 110. Mr Limpus said that the MOS should be informed that the process had stalled, and should be given the opportunity to nominate Signatory States to be part a working group to take things forward. The Secretariat proposed that an intersessional working group be formed to consider the issues and complete the process after MOS8.
 111. Saaif Mohamed Rasheed (Maldives / Sub-Regional Focal Point Northern Indian Ocean) asked whether it would be acceptable to use the data underpinning the designation of Biosphere Reserves for IOSEA Sites. The Chair recalled that one of the Signatory States had suggested saving time and effort by allowing material from other processes to be recycled as much as possible. It was required, however, to fill in the forms prepared for evaluation against the criteria.
 112. The Secretariat informed the meeting that managers of the existing Sites had been requested to provide some updates, and that responses had been made available as Information Documents MOS8/Inf.9.1.a-h. They had been posted as received. Ms Nel said that these updates might reveal the added value of the Site Network designation.
 113. Ms Al Sariri suggested comparing other site designation systems to ascertain what success indicators were used.
 114. The Chair asked that progress on existing sites be reviewed to ascertain what added value was being achieved.

7.7.1 Review of Site Network Proposal from Viet Nam

115. Ms Tiwari, Mr Hamann and Ms Nel had reviewed the proposal submitted by Viet Nam regarding the addition of Con Dao National Park to the Site Network and found it to be in order. They had requested a few amendments, which had been undertaken by the proponent, and the revised proposal had been forwarded to the MOS for further consideration as MOS8/Doc.9.2.

7.8. Marine Turtle Genetic Studies

116. Mr Limpus said that at MOS7, Nancy FitzSimmons had presented a document on genetics (see MOS7/Doc.10.2 [Marine Turtle Genetic Stocks of the Indo-Pacific: Identifying Boundaries and Knowledge Gaps](#)). Further complementary studies had been done in the meantime. Ms FitzSimmons had identified where stocks had not been examined, and a recommendation had been made that Signatory States should pursue more genetic studies. Populations should be defined by the location of nests (nesting assemblages, not necessarily individual beaches). Some of these were very small, extending tens of kilometres, while others were much larger (e.g. the north coast of Australia).
117. Genetic data indicated that Loggerhead Turtles in Peru/Chile came from Australia. Females were tagged on nesting beaches and males in courtship areas (3,000 Green Turtles had been tagged in the Philippines). They were being tracked through satellite telemetry, but because of the costs, the sample sizes were small. Causes of mortality were identified as bycatch, illegal take and direct harvest, all of which occurred away from beaches.
118. There were issues concerning building capacity and addressing how to do DNA tests when material could not be exported, which might involve training staff in countries with relevant expertise. Some countries had experience in fish and coral genetics, which could be transferred to turtles. More stocks were being identified in areas where Green Turtles were not known to frequent before.
119. Ms Nel agreed, but cautioned that the term “DNA testing” covered a wide range of techniques and said it would be preferable to state clearly what was intended (nuclear DNAs or mitochondrial). It was also relevant whether samples were fresh or taken from historic stocks.
120. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma pointed out that there was no specific agenda item concerning genetics, so care would have to be taken to ensure that any actions were included in the Work Programme.

7.9. Bycatch and RFMO Issues

121. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma presented MOS8/Doc.10.3 [Developments in Relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organizations \(RFMOs\)](#) which reported on developments in the four regional fisheries management organizations in the IOSEA range, including the latest resolutions from the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission. The meeting noted the document.

7.10. Cooperation with CMS

122. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma introduced MOS8/Doc.10.4 [Outcomes of CMS COP12 and Opportunities for Collaboration](#), which gave an overview of the main outcomes of CMS COP12 relevant to turtles and a preview of COP13, which would take place in February 2020 in India. Document production for COP13 was well under way. There were important links between CMS and the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU, an example being boat-based turtle watching, 'swim with' programmes and aquatic wild meat. One COP12 decision on marine turtles had not yet been implemented, but was being taken forward. There were also plans for the development of a Single Species Action Plan for Hawksbill Turtles, covering South-East Asia and extending into the Western Pacific, which should be developed jointly by CMS and the MOU.
123. Mr Limpus informed the meeting that there was a proposal to discontinue the position of a COP-appointed member of the CMS Scientific Council for marine turtles. The Secretariat said that a review was being undertaken and the options would be considered at the COP. If the position were discontinued, the input from the IOSEA AC to CMS processes relevant for marine turtles would be all the more vital.

8. Overview of Pending and Upcoming Commitments of the Advisory Committee

124. The Chair repeated his concern that the CMP was very ambitious and however useful it was to have a complex plan, the tasks had to be realistic. The aim of the Work Programme was to set the priorities. The role of the AC was to make recommendations and then it was for the MOS to decide. He asked the AC to comment candidly and to bear in mind the limited capacity available, since members of the AC were contributing their time voluntarily.
125. The academics on the AC were trained to question and should be prepared to ask what the point of each activity was. Meetings should be seen as a means to an end and not an end in themselves, the objective of the MOU being to conserve marine turtles and their habitats.

8.1. Work Programme for the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU

126. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma circulated MOS8/Doc.8.2 in Word format. AC members were requested to make any changes using the 'track change' facility. The Secretariat had produced a synthesis of all Action Points (MOS8/Doc.8.1), so nothing would be lost if deleted from the Draft Work Programme. The AC was requested to reduce the number of activities to make the actions as concrete as possible and to identify any gaps that needed to be filled.
127. Malta Qwathekana (South Africa) said that an ambitious programme could serve as an incentive to seek cooperation and synergies (e.g. CMS and CBD were working closely on connectivity). Marine Protected Areas presented an opportunity for IOSEA Signatory States to press for further such designations in other forums.
128. The Chair pointed out that the title of the MOU included the word 'habitats' as well as 'marine turtles'.
129. It was agreed that the AC would split into two working groups, with participation of the observers welcome, with each being supported by one Secretariat staff. Each group should consider how important each proposed activity in the Work Programme was, and

remove an activity if it wasn't high priority at the present time. Then they should review the wording of the remaining activities and seek to make the steps for implementation clear and identify the actors.

130. It was also agreed that the revised Draft Work Programme going forward to the MOS would not include proposed priorities, as the AC felt that it was for the sub-regions to discuss and agree on the priority-level of each measure.

8.2. Sub-Regional Focal Points and Marine Turtle Task Forces: Liaison, Coordination, and Support

131. The Chair repeated his delight at the participation of the Sub-Regional Focal Points in this meeting. It was much appreciated that they had taken the time to attend, and their contributions had been very useful. He asked how the AC could best support sub-regional coordination. This question should be raised in conjunction with addressing calls for assistance with improving communication in general.

132. Ms Tiwari asked that the list of National Focal Points on the website of the MOU be kept up to date. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma said that the list was accurate to the best of her knowledge, but that the Secretariat relied on Signatory States for notifications of any changes in personnel. There were some Signatory States for which there was no current National Focal Point.

133. The Chair said that, at a practical level, it was usually the Marine Turtle Task Forces (MTTFs) which had the most interface with National Focal Points.

134. MTTFs operated in the Western Indian Ocean and Northern Indian Ocean, and the Secretariat had arranged for the participation of the chairpersons in the MOS.

8.3. Technical Support and Capacity-building

135. The need for capacity-building in respect of a range of activities had been raised during discussion of several other agenda items. Capacity-building was therefore to be accorded high priority.

8.4. Revision of Site Network Process

136. The earlier discussion (see item 7.7) had made clear how important this discussion was. The three members of the working group undertook to work on a preliminary draft before the opening of the MOS, and would propose a way forward at that meeting.

8.5. Climate Change

137. Mr Limpus said that those involved in biodiversity conservation faced the challenge of securing sufficient resources, as the focus of governments' attention was on climate change. Species such as marine turtles were exposed to threats arising from climate change such as rising sea levels, beach erosion and rising sea temperatures. It was important to keep populations functional while solutions were sought.

8.6. Hatchery Issues

138. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma explained that Andrea Phillott, who would be attending MOS8 as an invited expert, had authored MOS8/Inf.11.3, which contained an overview of good practice relating to hatcheries. She had prepared this document upon request of the Northern Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force, and she and the Secretariat felt that this topic was relevant beyond that region and had therefore placed it on the agenda for AC8 and MOS8.
139. On a matter of a procedure, the Chair requested that documents be made available to the AC as far in advance as possible to allow sufficient time for them to be considered. It would be unfortunate if the AC objected to documents submitted by third parties at the MOS.
140. Mr Limpus foresaw some difficulties in framing advice that could apply to the entire IOSEA area, given that some countries did not have hatcheries but managed beaches.
141. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma cited the document, where it was stated that the preferred option was to leave eggs in their nests wherever possible. The AC was invited to comment and suggest revisions as appropriate. The author welcomed suggestions.
142. Ms Nel pointed out that some so-called threats were vital natural processes (e.g. erosion) and this raised the question of when intervention was appropriate. An ecosystem approach was needed, in which saving turtles did not put other elements of the environment at risk.
143. Mr Limpus said that Australia had adopted a policy of ensuring the survival of 70 per cent of each clutch.
144. It was agreed that the document was useful as a starting point for discussion, and Ms Phillott was thanked for her efforts. AC Members would speak to her before her presentation to the MOS to ensure their concerns and views would be taken into account. It was also agreed that more widely applicable guidance should be prepared which looked at management of beaches for successful hatchling production, including management of hatcheries if and when it would be required. A corresponding activity would be included in the revised Draft Work Programme.

8.7. Ghost Gear

145. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma referred to MOS8/Doc.10.5 [Offer of Collaboration on Impacts of "Ghost Gear" on Marine Turtles](#) and explained that the Secretariat had been contacted by Martin Stelfox of the Olive Ridley Project. He was interested in expanding his work on ghost gear to the entire Indian Ocean. Signatory States were being invited to provide data.
146. The meeting welcomed the offer, but cautioned that work on ghost gear should not distract attention from the much more pressing issue of bycatch in active fisheries.
147. Mr Kittiwattanawong said that in Thailand, ghost gear posed a threat to marine turtles, with data from stranded specimens indicating that 74 per cent had had an interaction with fisheries, with about half of them having been entangled in ghost nets.

9. Review of Unaddressed Priority Issues

148. Mr Hamann said that beaches last surveyed many years or even decades ago should be revisited to ascertain whether habitat was still available. Google Maps indicated in some cases that development had destroyed some beaches (e.g. on the Java Sea).
149. Mr Limpus said that on the east coast of Australia, Green Turtles had nested on islands in the Coral Sea and on the Great Barrier Reef. However, due to climate change, the beaches were now inundated at high tide and were lost as nesting habitat. Monitoring such locations was difficult because they were so remote.
150. Mr Miller said that updates were being done on beaches on the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf coasts, which had last been surveyed in the 1980s. Some political difficulties were impeding progress. These beaches might have had low density nesting but could still be very important to some populations.

9.1. IOSEA Strategic Plan

151. The Chair had placed this item on the agenda since it appeared that the idea of having a strategic plan for the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU had stalled. He recalled a facilitated two-day meeting in Brisbane in 2009, organized by the former coordinator Douglas Hykle. There seemed to be no record of the outcomes.
152. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma said that the report was available (there was a link in paragraph 3 of document 8.1), but had indeed been discovered by the new team only by chance, and they had been unable to find any evidence of follow-up from this meeting. It had been used as a source of information for some of the meeting documents prepared by Ms Orlinskiy and many of its more concrete content had been recycled, although the document had never been presented to Signatory States for their endorsement.
153. The Chair asked whether the document should be revived and circulated, and asked for views on having a strategic plan for the MOU, suggesting that it had possibly been superseded by the Work Programme.
154. Mr Hamann said that ten years on the document might still be of interest, but would almost certainly need to be updated.
155. Mr Miller suggested circulating the report so that AC members could make a judgement on how useful it was. He thought that the strategic plan was an umbrella document whereas the Work Programme contained the detail. Elements of the document prepared in Brisbane could be used as the introduction to the Work Programme.
156. Mr Limpus suggested that if Ms Orlinskiy had used the document as a source of information, then anything of value had probably already been extracted.
157. Ms Virtue said that no other MOUs under CMS had a strategic plan. The parent Convention did, and the forthcoming COP would decide on renewing the strategic plan for another period. On an initial cursory examination, the strategic plan closely resembled the Work Programme.
158. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma doubted whether investing into drafting a strategic plan was the best use of scarce resources. The MOU already had guidance from the CMP (and now the Draft Work Programme) which could be readily updated at each MOS. The 35-page

document produced at Brisbane began with overarching headers and what followed resembled a work programme.

159. Ms Tiwari questioned the need for a strategic plan, noting that the MOU had operated perfectly well without one.
160. Ms Nel said that she had attended the Brisbane meeting and recalled that the core document comprised seven pages with annexes. It had not been intended for a wider audience.

9.2. Setting and Respecting Priorities

161. The Chair reiterated that the purpose of the Work Programme was to set priorities given the very limited resources available to the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU.

9.3. Instilling a Culture of Objective Evaluation

162. The Chair said that academics on the AC would be familiar with the concept of evaluating the results of one's actions. One should always ask whether the results were what one had expected and how things could have been done better.

9.4. Social Issues / Human Dimensions

163. The Chair said that, as already mentioned by Mr Hamann, Ms Nel and others, a great deal of emphasis had been placed on biological considerations, with other factors such as alternative livelihoods and the rights of First Nation communities often neglected. These were, however, fundamental to the objectives of the MOU and CMP.
164. Mr Limpus said that in some cases he was struggling to reconcile indigenous rights and nature conservation. It was not possible to legislate for nature conservation if indigenous rights were infringed upon. He asked what should take precedence if a species was threatened with extinction and no level of use could be considered sustainable.
165. Ms Virtue advised that the UN's view was that this was an issue for national governments. The Convention on Biological Diversity might also have guidance.
166. Ms Qwathekana said that science should be balanced with traditional knowledge. One local community had won a court case after having demonstrated that its use of marine resources was sustainable.

10. Proposed Terms of Reference for Advisory Committee

167. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma explained that Australia had submitted MOS8/Doc.14.1.a [Proposal: Terms of Reference for the IOSEA Advisory Committee](#) to MOS8. It suggested to retain many of the established procedures, such as nominations of the AC Members by another country (one that was not the candidate's own) and the desired variety of expertise on the AC. However, it proposed a fundamental change to the terms to be served by AC Members, proposing to limit it to two intersessional periods. Only in exceptional cases would a further extension be considered.

168. AC Members expressed concern that this would impact the operation of the AC significantly, and would carry the risk of destroying continuity. A number of AC Members had already served for a very long time and would subsequently have to step down soon if this proposal was accepted.
169. There were also a number of practical questions which remained unclear in the proposal. While ultimately the decision would rest with the Signatory States, the AC expressed its hope that there would be open and constructive discussions on this item at the MOS before a decision was made.

11. Closing of the Meeting

170. After the customary expressions of thanks to the hosts, the Secretariat, the Chair and all that had contributed to the success of the meeting, the Chair declared proceedings closed.

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Agenda

1. Welcoming Remarks
2. Admission of Observers and Adoption of Agenda
3. Summary of the Objectives and Outcomes of the 7th Meeting of the IOSEA Signatory States (MOS7), September 2014
4. Review of Past Work of the Advisory Committee and its Members since MOS7
5. Overview of Arrangements for, and Objectives of the 8th Meeting of Signatory States (MOS8)
6. Clarification of the Role, Responsibilities, and Position of the Advisory Committee
7. Overview of implementation of, and follow-up from, MOS7, and Work Programme for MOS8
 - 7.1. Analysis of National Reports
 - 7.2. Hawksbill Turtle Assessment
 - 7.3. Casuarina Project
 - 7.4. Environmental Impact Assessment
 - 7.5. CITES Report on Marine Turtle Trade
 - 7.6. Ramsar Resolution on Marine Turtles
 - 7.7. Revision of Site Network Process
 - 7.7.1 Review of Site Network Proposal from Viet Nam
 - 7.8. Marine Turtle Genetic Studies
 - 7.9. Bycatch and RFMO Issues
 - 7.10. Cooperation with CMS
8. Overview of Pending and Upcoming Commitments of the Advisory Committee
 - 8.1. Work Programme for the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU
 - 8.2. Sub-Regional Focal Points and Marine Turtle Task Forces: Liaison, Coordination, and Support
 - 8.3. Technical Support and Capacity-building
 - 8.4. Revision of Site Network Process
 - 8.5. Climate Change
 - 8.6. Hatchery Issues
 - 8.7. Ghost Gear
9. Review of Unaddressed Priority Issues
 - 9.1. IOSEA Strategic Plan
 - 9.2. Setting and Respecting Priorities
 - 9.3. Instilling a Culture of Objective Evaluation
 - 9.4. Social Issues / Human Dimensions
10. Proposed Terms of Reference for Advisory Committee
11. Closing of the Meeting



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

