

Executive Summary

The Seventh Meeting of the Signatory States to the Indian Ocean – South-East Asian Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (IOSEA SS7) was held in Bonn, Germany, from 8-11 September 2014. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Alexis Gutierrez, the United States' Focal Point for IOSEA. It was preceded by a three-day session of the IOSEA Advisory Committee and a one-day session of the Western Indian Ocean - Marine Turtle Task Force (WIO-MTTF).

Twenty-three Signatory States were officially represented at SS7, along with six of the eight Advisory Committee members, as well as invited experts and observers from various intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. The meeting had been scheduled for July 2014, but the political situation in Thailand in the first half of the year prompted its postponement and relocation to Bonn, home of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) under whose aegis IOSEA was concluded in 2001. At the start of the meeting, Mr. Bradnee Chambers, CMS Executive Secretary, described IOSEA as one of the Convention's most successful regional instruments.

Since the last meeting of Signatory States, Sudan and Egypt had signed the MoU, bringing the IOSEA membership to 35 countries. There were only a few countries with significant coastlines that had yet to join, notably Somalia and three nations with important fishing interests in the Indian Ocean: China, Japan and Republic of Korea.

The meeting included many issues of regional and global significance for marine turtle conservation. Besides reviewing implementation of the IOSEA Conservation and Management Plan, the meeting considered substantial papers on four themes identified as priorities by the Signatory States when they last met in Bangkok in January 2012: (1) Illegal Take and Trade of Marine Turtles in the IOSEA Region; (2) Marine Turtle Genetic Stocks of the Indo-Pacific; (3) Socio-economic and Cultural Implications of Marine Turtle Use and Conservation; and (4) Indian Ocean Fisheries-Turtle Interactions. A fifth major topic was a review of IOSEA's Technical Support / Capacity-Building Programme, including recommendations for its future direction, led by the IOSEA Advisory Committee. Most of the priority topics discussed by Signatory States had been deliberated by the Advisory Committee during its earlier session.

A highlight of the gathering was the [launch of the IOSEA Network of Sites of Importance for Marine Turtles](#), culminating many years of intensive developmental work. The network is intended to enhance the local-to-global scale recognition of the importance of selected sites, while offering conservation benefits that are most readily achieved through a well-coordinated mechanism. It will optimise use of limited resources and will help to diffuse adverse socio-economic impacts over a wider geographic scale, while promoting ecological connectivity as well as resistance and resilience to environmental stress.

Proposals for the inclusion of ten network sites had been officially submitted by nine countries spread across the Indian Ocean. The Advisory Committee carefully reviewed each of the proposals, using the agreed Evaluation Criteria, to determine whether or not the individual proposals attained a minimum benchmark score. Committee members worked with proponents in the margins of the meeting to address issues in the proposals that had been submitted. The meeting agreed a modified decision framework with which to consider the Advisory Committee's recommendations. Ultimately, all of the 10 candidate sites were accepted for inclusion in the Network. The contents of four of the site proposals were deemed suitable for publication on the IOSEA website, namely: [Europa Island](#) (France), [Aldabra Atoll](#) (Seychelles), [iSimangaliso Wetland Park World Heritage Site](#) (South Africa), and [Rufiji – Mafia Seascape](#) (United Republic of Tanzania). The other six sites also met the criteria for inclusion in the Network but the meeting decided that their contents would be published on the IOSEA website only after certain amendments to their supporting documentation had been effected. The sites in question are: [Itsamia, Moheli](#) (Comoros), [Thameehla Island](#) (Myanmar), [Shidvar Island](#) (Islamic Republic of Iran), Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary (Philippines), and [Bu Tinah Shoal](#) and [Sir Bu Na'air Island](#) (United Arab Emirates). It was agreed that the amendments should be made

within six months of the conclusion of IOSEA SS7, with mentorship from the Advisory Committee. The meeting emphasised the importance of timely submission of future Site Network proposals. Seven countries – namely Australia, Mauritius, Oman, Seychelles, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States – and Advisory Committee member Ronel Nel, volunteered to form a working group tasked with revisiting the Site Network Information Sheet template in the months following the meeting.

It was recognised that the main needs for operationalising the Site Network were funding and capacity-building. Representatives of Australia and the United States, Lindsey West (Sea Sense, Invited Expert), and Marina Antonopoulou (EWS-WWF) volunteered to form the initial core of a steering committee tasked with securing long-term financial support for site-based activities in the months following the meeting. The Coordinator also offered to provide input during his sabbatical.

The Secretariat presented its customary [overview of IOSEA implementation progress](#), based on an analysis of the national reports submitted by Signatory States. About half of the Signatories had made substantial progress towards fulfilling their reporting requirements, a quarter of them had made some progress; and the remainder had not updated their reports for some years or, in a few cases, had not reported at all. A colour-coded performance matrix showed how much progress each Signatory was making and how well the MoU was doing collectively for each of the 24 programmes of work under the IOSEA Conservation and Management Plan. Australia, France and South Africa appeared to be performing best, followed by a group of eight other Signatories. Of the four sub-regions, the Western Indian Ocean had distinguished itself, followed by the Northern Indian Ocean and South-East Asia⁺. The Northwest Indian Ocean continued to trail by a considerable margin, in part due to non-reporting by several countries. Overall, there were positive trends for implementation across 14 of the 24 programmes and in 25 of the 33 Signatories reporting, notably the United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Madagascar, Malaysia and Pakistan.

Generally, the reports provided a good overview of marine turtle populations and good examples of conservation work and challenges being faced. The Secretariat noted that improvements could be made by including more information on fisheries by-catch and related mitigation measures, as well as details of conservation of critical habitats outside protected areas, and by including more specific descriptions of resource needs and mobilisation of domestic resources. IOSEA would also benefit from a more equitable sharing of operational costs. The Secretariat's analysis highlighted several other specific areas in which Signatory State reporting or implementation could be improved.

The [review of complementary site-based information](#) contained in the national reports revealed by-catch in coastal fisheries to be the greatest threat to marine turtles, followed by natural predation, and excessive egg collection. Specific actions were identified for Signatory States to undertake in order to improve the quality and coverage of their site-specific data.

The Secretariat introduced the main features of the [IOSEA website](#), including the dynamic news page, various technical databases and useful online resources. Attention was drawn to the new [International Flipper Tag Recovery database](#), having an initial emphasis on the Western Indian Ocean; and delegates were invited to register and provide data and feedback. It was suggested that further training on the use of IOSEA online tools and completion of national reports could be conducted through webinars.

Four substantive papers arising from requests of the Sixth Meeting of IOSEA Signatory States were presented. A paper prepared by the Secretariat on '[Illegal Take and Trade of Marine Turtles in the IOSEA Region](#)' highlighted the prevalence of poaching in South-East Asia involving Chinese and Vietnamese fishermen, particularly in the Coral Triangle area, to supply markets in mainland China, Taiwan and Japan. Bali remained a hotspot for trade in live green turtles; while Kalimantan, Indonesia, was identified as an important source of eggs to supply Malaysia, particularly the state of Terengganu. Possible solutions to diminish the trade at local levels were drawn from experiences around the IOSEA region. These varied depending on the nature of the drivers for turtle trade.

Potential synergies were identified between IOSEA and various other organisations, including the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime, INTERPOL, ASEAN, CITES and TRAFFIC. The Secretariat was requested to increase the visibility of illegal take and trade issues on the IOSEA website; and to update its paper with a view to making a joint intervention (with the Secretariat of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles) to the CITES COP17 (South Africa, 2016). The meeting also convened to establish a working group to address issues related to turtle trade.

A second paper on '[Marine Turtle Genetic Stocks of the Indo-Pacific](#)', co-authored by Dr. Colin Limpus, presented the current state of knowledge about marine turtle stocks in the IOSEA region. It emphasised that the retention of small populations was also important for maintenance of biodiversity. Signatory States requested the Advisory Committee and the Secretariat to assist them to identify needs and opportunities for regional analyses to inform stock assessment across the species' entire range. On request, the Advisory Committee would provide guidance on collection protocols and facilitate contacts with laboratories. Signatories were encouraged to incorporate genetic sampling into their ongoing monitoring activities, and to submit haplotype information to genetic banks and share sequenced data. The meeting also identified a need to complete ongoing genetics work on green, loggerhead and hawksbill turtles.

A third paper on '[Socio-economic and Cultural Implications of Marine Turtle Use and Conservation](#)' covered a multitude of topics with a social, economic or cultural dimension. These included the promotion of alternative livelihoods for marine turtle users and the role of education in marine turtle conservation. Examples from around the region emphasised the importance of understanding the human element in order to develop a more multidisciplinary approach for conservation. The WIO-MTTF proposed to hold a series of workshops in the Western Indian Ocean to examine more closely the relevant socio-economic and cultural factors. The Secretariat pointed out that IOSEA would benefit if the lessons-learned could be shared more widely and if successful programmes conducted in one country could be emulated elsewhere in the region.

A fourth paper on '[Indian Ocean Fisheries-Turtle Interactions](#)' illustrated the potential contribution of Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) national reports towards understanding of marine turtle bycatch issues in the Indian Ocean, including the efficacy of by-catch mitigation measures undertaken by IOTC members. IOSEA Signatory States were encouraged to initiate or continue dialogue about IOSEA issues among countries that are also IOTC members, and to intervene as appropriate in relevant fora. Concerns about gill nets, fish aggregating devices (FADs) and other fisheries-related sources of turtle mortality were to be addressed to the IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and By-catch (WPEB). The Secretariat was requested to assess current RFMO resolutions and active conservation management measures, including data collection requirements; and to keep Signatory States informed about developments in relation to sub-regional by-catch assessment projects. The United States (NOAA) offered to investigate the possibility of collaborating with IOTC/IOSEA in the delivery of technical support such as marine turtle-related observer training, and Oman offered to share methods and lessons learned from current studies on fisheries interactions

Advisory Committee member Dr. Jeff Miller [presented an in-depth review](#) of the history, methods and challenges faced in the development of the IOSEA Technical Support / Capacity-building Programme, the ultimate objective of which was to ensure that all Signatories are self-sufficient. He pointed out a number of issues with the IOSEA national report format. In their sub-regional discussions, Signatory States requested the Advisory Committee to respond to specific requests for capacity-building support, including those from United Republic of Tanzania and Madagascar; to work with Signatories to assess and advise on hatchery management practices (e.g. in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines); and to identify potential opportunities for sub-regional capacity building/technical workshops, in particular in the NWIO and NIO regions.

The meeting reconsidered the comprehensive assessments of leatherback and loggerhead turtles that had been updated or completed in 2012 and 2013, respectively. Both documents had identified gaps in biology or management that needed to be addressed and included specific suggestions and recommendations. The Advisory Committee had reviewed and developed further the project concepts arising from the updated 2012 Leatherback Assessment. Areas upon which to focus included improving leatherback hatching success in Mozambique, devising a low-cost monitoring protocol for Sri Lanka, and examining egg relocation and hatchery practices in Malaysia and Thailand. Data were scarce for nesting sites in Java and Sumatra and this might be addressed at low cost by mobilising local communities. Three further projects were identified for possible follow-up in relation to loggerhead turtles: (1) examination of hatchling production, dispersal and survival rates; (2) analysis of existing data from Oman, Yemen (Socotra), and Sri Lanka; and (3) assessment of the species' vulnerability to climate change, including changing sex ratios.

Two workshops incorporated into the conference programme provided much food for thought. The first one, addressing the pervasive problem of artificial light pollution, included three technical presentations: an [overview on Artificial Light at Night \(ALAN\) assessment, measurement and management](#) (Dr. Kellie Pendoley); a review of recent studies suggesting that darkness is the best lighting management option at nesting beaches (Dr. Colin Limpus); and consideration of the human dimensions of light pollution management (Dr. Mark Hamann). The second workshop, conducted by Dr. Peter Richardson, focussed on 'Stakeholder Engagement through the Community Voice Method', which had included the production of a documentary-style film based on stakeholder interviews. His presentation offered insights into this innovative approach used in the Caribbean to involve stakeholders in the decision-making process.

The meeting was further enlightened by two additional expert presentations concerning: [market forces driving marine turtle trade in China and Japan](#), delivered by Marina Antonopoulou (Emirates Wildlife Society); and projects in the IOSEA region funded by the [United States Marine Turtle Conservation Act of 2004](#), presented by Mr. Earl Possardt (USFWS).

Turning to administrative matters, the Secretariat drew attention to the '[Terms of Reference and Guidance for IOSEA Focal Points](#)' which clarified the general roles and responsibilities of IOSEA national and sub-regional Focal Points and offered guidance to assist Focal Points in their intersessional work. The IOSEA sub-regional Focal Points were appointed as follows: Thailand (for South-East Asia⁺); Maldives (for Northern Indian Ocean); Oman (for Northwest Indian Ocean); and Kenya (for Western Indian Ocean).

The IOSEA Advisory Committee was reconstituted with the addition of three new members, Mr. Robert Baldwin, Mr. Jérôme Bourjea and Dr. Ronel Nel; and the re-nomination of four existing members, Drs. Jack Frazier, Jeffrey Miller, Colin Limpus and Mark Hamann, who will continue to serve alongside Dr. Manjula Tiwari. The further development of technical support to Signatory States, in particular regarding hatchery management practices and the conduct of Environmental Impact Assessments; guidance in relation to the IOSEA Site Network; and revision of the [Site Network Evaluation Criteria](#) and [Site Information Sheet template](#) were among the tasks assigned to the Advisory Committee. It was further agreed that a hawksbill species assessment would be drafted by the Committee inter-sessionally and presented at the Eighth Meeting of Signatories in 2017.

The meeting learned of the exemplary efforts of Kenya, Mauritius, Oman, Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania to establish national committees to promote inter-agency cooperation in relation to marine turtle conservation issues. Further details of these and other initiatives, obtained through a questionnaire administered periodically by the Secretariat, can be found in a [dedicated section of the IOSEA website](#). Representatives of Thailand and the United Arab Emirates each offered to consider hosting and organising an intersessional sub-regional meeting with a view to promoting cooperation within their respective constituencies.

The Secretariat presented a report on IOSEA's financial situation and took the opportunity to acknowledge the continuing voluntary contributions from Australia, France, India, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, South Africa, Thailand, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania and United States, as well as facilities and services provided by the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, in Bangkok. The meeting endorsed the proposed budget for 2015-2017, averaging US\$315,000 per annum, together with an indicative scale of contributions, with the understanding that all financial support remained voluntary and that fulfilment of the programme budget lines depended on the level of contributions received. The meeting raised the minimum indicative voluntary contribution from US\$500 to US\$750 per annum and agreed that the next Meeting of IOSEA Signatory States be held in the first half of 2017.

The proposed arrangements for the IOSEA Secretariat during the special leave of the Co-ordinator, beginning in October 2014, were discussed. During Mr. Hykle's absence the Secretariat would temporarily relocate to Bonn, where Ms. Clara Nobbe (UNEP/DELCO) would replace him for one year. The CMS Executive Secretary assured Signatories that the 85/15 percent split of the interim Coordinator's time between IOSEA- and CMS-related work would be maintained and that IOSEA would also benefit from greater attention from and synergies with the parent CMS Secretariat.

Apart from the formal discussions that took place within the meeting proper, there were many opportunities for delegates to share information and experiences informally. While these exchanges do not appear in the report of the meeting, they have immense value in increasing knowledge and creating bonds between countries.

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