

APPENDIX E

Update on the Council's Turtle Conservation Program, established 2002

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The Council is a significant stakeholder in the recovery of sea turtles, and in February 2002 it convened a Western Pacific Sea Turtle Cooperative Research & Management Workshop to gain direction for its sea turtle conservation program. Over the past 18 months, the Council in collaboration with National Marine Fisheries Service - Pacific Islands Fishery Science Center (PIFSC), the Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO), and the Southwest Fishery Science Center (SWFSC) has laid the groundwork for significant turtle conservation efforts in the Western Pacific Region.

In May 2003, the Council hired a full-time sea turtle coordinator to oversee and direct the conservation program, and implemented a Turtle Advisory Committee (TAC) to direct and advise the Council in its turtle conservation activities. This TAC is comprised of seven experts who have long-term commitments, exemplary experience and knowledge in sea turtle biology, conservation, management, research, modeling, and oceanography with cumulative expertise of all six species of turtles occurring in the Pacific Ocean¹.

Based on suggestions by the regional experts who participated at the Sea Turtle Workshop (2002), the U.S. Sea Turtle Recovery Plans and advice from the TAC, the Council has developed priorities for its sea turtle conservation program. Program objectives are directed towards the following six areas of concentration and will function in coordination with all relevant regional organizations including SPREP, SPC, FAO, ASEAN-SEAFDEC, FFA and ADB²:

1. Research: To fill information gaps
 - a. Regional Tagging Database - SPREP
 - b. Promote population assessments in the Pacific Islands Region
2. Measures to reduce direct harvest
 - a. Of eggs & adults
 - b. Economic incentives (to reduce harvest pressures)
3. Habitat Protection – i.e. stock enhancement
 - a. Nesting beach management
 - b. Implement Coral Reef MPA's
4. Education / Outreach
 - a. Community involvement, Increased awareness
5. International Management / Liaison / Networking
 - a. Meetings & Workshops
6. Fishery Mitigation Measures
 - a. Gear technology transfer & Involving fishers in research efforts

Recommendations from the TAC concluded that conservation efforts should be divided into two

¹TAC membership includes: Dr. Colin Limpus, Mr. George Balazs, Dr. Peter Dutton, Dr. Milani Chaloupka, Dr. Jeffrey Polovina, and newly added (August 2003) Dr. Naoki Kamazaki and Ms. Laura Sarti Martinez. The first TAC meeting convened July 29 - 30, 2003.

² South Pacific Regional Environmental Program, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Food and Agricultural Organization, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Forum Fisheries Agency, and Asian Development Bank

areas. NMFS' Regional Office in Honolulu (PIRO) will focus primarily on sea turtle related management and conservation programs in the U.S. Flag States (Hawaii, America Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas) and U.S. Micronesian Compact Areas (Palau, Federated States of Micronesia and Marshal Islands). While the Council will direct its efforts towards international projects with a focus on those species which are of greatest likelihood to interact with the Hawaii-based longline fishery, namely loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles.

Sea Turtle Conservation Projects in Progress.			
Project	Region	Funding Agency	Purpose
Satellite Tagging March 2003: 10 ARGOS and 4 PAT satellite tags deployed. Project to continue into the future	Papua, PNG	PIRO/SWFSC	To provide clues to additional nesting sites, and will be used as a basis to design aerial surveys. To fill information gaps regarding migratory movements.
Leatherback Aerial Survey ⁴	PNG, West Papua Vanuatu, and Solomon Isl.	PIRO/SWFSC	Four year study to establish a comprehensive inventory of leatherback nesting beaches.
Sea turtle in-water survey	CNMI	PIRO	Population assessments, capacity building
Tagging & surveys	Guam	DAWR/PIRO	Population assessments, capacity building
Tagging & surveys	America Samoa	DMWR/PIRO	Population assessments, capacity building
Green & hawksbill turtle survey	Palau	PMRD/PSC/TNC/PIRO	Population assessment, education & outreach
Tagging & surveys	Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)	MIRFA/GPA/PIRO	Yap tagging and monitoring program, re-initiate genetic stock identification.
Education to Reduce Adverse Interactions Between Commercial Fishing Operations and Sea Turtles	Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)	PIRO (S-K grant) MIRFA/GPA/	To improve the capabilities of observers in recognizing, handling, and reporting interactions between turtles and LL fisheries. Transfer sea turtle conservation technology.

Tagging Database development	Regional: SPREP/SPC ASEAN- SEAFDEC	Council	Rehabilitation, upgrade and restoration of SPREP turtle tagging databases
Education & Outreach	Guam	Council	Education Poster
Cultural survey	Republic of the Marshall Isl. (RMI)	MIRFA/GPA/ PIRO	Define parameters for potential research. ID past and ongoing research; literature search; feasibility and logistics study
Policy Post-Doc	Pacific Ocean basin	SWFSC/PIRO	A two-year post-doctoral position in the economics of sea turtle conservation.
<u>International Meetings:</u> 1. 2 nd International Fishers Forum -IFF 2. 23 rd Annual Sea Turtle Symposium 3. Japan Fisheries Agency 4. People & the Sea Conference 5. Bellagio, Italy 6. 24 th Annual Sea Turtle Symposium <u>Other</u> www.seaturtle.org server fund donation	<u>Liaison & Networking:</u> 1. Hawaii 2. Kuala Lumpur 3. Japan 4. Amsterdam 5. Italy 6. Costa Rica	Council	<u>IFF:</u> Forum for fishermen and scientists to exchange information and ideas on technologies and strategies to mitigate sea turtle and seabird interactions with longline fisheries <u>23rd Sea Turtle Symp.:</u> Travel support to Kuala Lumpur for 30 Pacific Islanders and Asian participants. <u>Japan Fisheries Agency:</u> Liaison & collaboration activities to develop sea turtle mitigation measures <u>People & the Sea:</u> (Sept. 2003) Increase awareness of Pacific Island sea turtle issues <u>Bellagio, Italy:</u> (Nov. 2003) Conservation and sustainable management of sea turtles in the Pacific Ocean – travel grant for participants. <u>24th Sea Turtle Symp.:</u> Participants support to Costa Rica – travel grant

⁴ Aerial Surveys scheduled for four years, goals include: 1) Determine beaches with significant LB nesting (≥ 200 nests) outside Gulf of Huon, PNG; 2) Provide ground

counts of LB nests at 'significant' locations; 3) Estimate nesting population of LB via fixed-wing and helicopter aerial surveys and concurrent ground counts along the entire north coast of PNG; and 4) Conduct capacity building of local researchers in aerial census techniques.

The first meeting of the Turtle Advisory Committee convened July 29-30, 2003. During this meeting the TAC reviewed and critiqued the Council and PIRO's turtle conservation projects to date. The TAC had many constructive recommendations for both agencies and in general suggested that the Council redirect sea turtle conservation projects towards long-term projects to obtain demographic and population abundance data on key populations of Southwest Pacific leatherbacks and North Pacific loggerheads (i.e., those species which interact with the Hawaii-based fishery). In addition, the TAC suggested that more energy be directed towards Education & Outreach, especially in the U.S. Flag Territories and Compact States, and recommended that population assessment surveys being conducted in these areas be augmented with laparoscopy to provide more useful information on nesting population dynamics (e.g., nesting periodicity, status, fecundity, etc.).

The TAC further recommended that both the Council and PIRO extend its horizons outside the typical jurisdiction area to incorporate Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and New Caledonia in research efforts. In particular, to identify possible leatherback nesting sites, and identify and quantify any fishery or direct harvest related threats that may be occurring in these areas impacting hawksbills, leatherbacks or loggerheads. Research efforts could be effectively be coordinated with the assistance of local community groups and/or Non-governmental Organization (i.e., The Nature Conservancy and World Wildlife Fund).

Future activities proposed for FY03 by PIRO includes taking the FSM "success" on the road to transfer sea turtle conservation technology, assist with observer training and work with local and locally-based longline fleets operating in the RMI and PNG. A goal for work in PNG is to assist with implementation of an observer program, work to determine the magnitude of fishery/turtle interactions, assist with education and outreach, and work to reduce incidental takes in the Torres Strait and Gulf of Papua prawn trawl fishery by helping to implement the use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TED's).

Future Council activities and goals for FY03/04 include the continuation of the regional tagging database rehabilitation project and assisting SPREP to acquire an appropriate Turtle Database Officer; promote nesting beach management and stock enhancement for leatherback and loggerhead turtles; contract the development of a Hawksbill simulation model; continue to support satellite tagging activities of leatherback turtles in PNG and Indonesia; and focus energy towards education and outreach activities. In addition, the Council is committed to supporting and developing sea turtle related meetings including: a conference in Bellagio, Italy (Nov. 17 – 22, 2003) on the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Sea Turtles in the Pacific Ocean; travel support for participants attending the 24th Annual Sea Turtle Symposium in Costa Rica; development and support of the 3rd International Fishers Forum (to continue the work to reduce sea turtle interactions with longline fisheries); and reconvene the Western Pacific Sea Turtle Cooperative Research and Management Workshop (May 2004 – agenda to be determined).