



Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of  
Sea Turtles  
Eight Conference of the Parties (COP8)  
June 28-30, 2017 – Buenos Aires, Argentina

## **Eight Conference of the Parties (COP8)**

### **Executive Summary**

The Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP8) of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) was held on June 28-30, 2017 in Buenos Aires, Argentina at the Argenta Tower Hotel. The meeting was attended by representatives of 12 IAC member countries (Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, the United States, and Venezuela), the IAC Scientific and Consultative Committees Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively. Accredited observers from six non-governmental organizations (Fundación Mundo Marino, CONICET-INIDEP, Karumbe, Humane Society International, Center for Biological Diversity and Justsea) and the Executive Secretary of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels –ACAP- participated in the meeting as well, for a total of 35 participants.

Mr. Daniel Romero, Secretary of Environmental Policy, Climate Change and Sustainable Development of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina provided the opening remarks. Mr. Romero highlighted Argentina efforts on sea turtle conservation, and the COP8 Chair, Mr. Antonio De Nichilo highlighted the importance of hosting the COP considering the challenging of doing sea turtle conservation in the country, as they are not easily visible for the public. Mr. Nichilo pointed out that the IAC continues towards strengthening and grow with the mission of bringing conservation principles to colleagues in other countries, raise awareness among citizens, and align with other initiatives principles such as the mitigation of climate change. The Chair called the Parties to actively participate with diplomatic approaches to no IAC members and encourage them to accede to the Convention. In the afternoon, Argentina's Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Rabbi Sergio Bergman, greeted and welcomed the delegations, along with a reflection on the importance of preserving the environment, our common house.

The COP8 Agenda was adopted with the inclusion of the United Nations Sustainable Development agency on the Agenda 20/30 the third day of the meeting. The rapporteur was Argentina's Chancellery.

Mexico circulated information on conservation actions in this country among the participants. Argentina presented their progress on Sea Turtle conservation including their achievements in collaboration with organizations from the civil society and highlighting that the main threat for the three species (i.e. *Dermochelys coriacea*, *Caretta caretta*,

*Chelonia mydas*) occurring in the country are plastic pollution and the impact of their ingestion by the animals.

The IAC Secretary *Pro Tempore* presented her activities reports 2015-2017, announcing Dominican Republic accession to the IAC, increasing membership to 16 Parties. The Chair of the Scientific Committee, Mr. Diego Albareda, presented the work of his Committee for the period 2015-2017, and the results of the report “Status of Loggerhead Turtles Within Nations of the IAC”, noting modifications suggested by Venezuela. The Vice-Chair of the Consultative Committee of Experts, Mr. Joao Thome, presented the work of the CCE along with the report on Resolution Compliance based on the IAC Annual Reports. A general average of compliance with the IAC Resolutions showed that for the period 2015-2016 the Hawksbill Turtle Resolution has the highest compliance (66%), followed by the Leatherback Resolution (48%), and the Fisheries Resolution (38%). The need for the Parties to submit their Annual Report on the date agreed in order to carry out this analysis with robust data is stressed out by the CCE Vice-Chair.

The COP8 updated the Committees and Secretary *Pro Tempore* work plans 2017-2019 according to the Parties requirements. A component to support the improvement of technical capacities with the help of experts from both Committees when required by Parties, as well as financial support for it was included. A particular case is that of Ecuador requesting technical support to follow up on the construction of a port near a nesting beach in Machalilla, in which IAC experts would provide information on the indicator to monitor to ensure the construction is not causing a negative impact on the turtles. Brazil offered assistance on this case. Also, Brazil proposed the use of the app Pic4Turtle in the work plan communication strategy. The app is an image database and Brazil offered to sponsor the IAC Parties to use it free. It was agreed that Brazil would send a formal proposal to the IAC Parties with information on how it works so the Countries can instruct the IAC Secretary on how to proceed with the proposal. Guatemala, Panama, and Honduras included an item on the support of their chancelleries to increase the IAC membership by inviting no member countries as observers in the IAC meetings. This same strategy will be used in the framework of the Central American Integration System meeting to approach Nicaragua and El Salvador. The COP8 identified the following countries as a priority to be approached: Colombia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Canada, Surinam, and the Guianas.

Costa Rica and Panama presented their progress on the compliance with the Resolution on Exceptions. Costa Rica highlighted the approval of the Five Year Plan for Management and Conservation of the Olive Ridley’s Turtle in Ostional 2017-2021, as well as the standardization of sampling using Valverde & Gates method; and Panama highlighted the approval of their Sea Turtle Conservation National Action Plan.

Regarding progress on the establishment of the IAC Permanent Secretariat, the United States presented a response from the State Department denying the status of the IAC as an International Organization as it does not meet the United States legal requirements and therefore preventing the establishment of a Permanent Secretariat using that mechanism. However, the United States reaffirms its support an interest to continue hosting the Secretariat *Pro Tempore* and will continue exploring mechanisms for establishing a Permanent Secretariat. The Resolution on the extension of the Secretariat *Pro Tempore* was

presented to formalize this agreement, and Resolution CIT-COP8-2017- R2 was approved where: 1) the United States proposal to continue hosting the Secretariat *Pro Tempore* for 4 more years is adopted, 2) authorizes to extend the Secretariat *Pro Tempore* employment until December 31st, 2021 and 3) potential options for a Permanent Secretariat in the United States after 2021 will be explored.

Peru presented its joined actions with Mexico and the United States on capacity building in the fisheries sector for the conservation of the East Pacific (EP) Leatherback in this country. A video presented the visit of four Peruvian fishermen to the leatherback nesting beach at Barra de la Cruz (Oaxaca, Mexico) to witness nesting leatherbacks. Ms. Laura Sarti, the delegate from Mexico, presented the Recommendations from the IAC Leatherback Taskforce to address current threats to the EP leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), included in the document CIT-COP8-2017-Doc.2. The United States suggested adding a recommendation for the IAC Secretary *PT* to participate in the meetings of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and its advisory Scientific Committee to communicate them the IAC expert's recommendations.

Costa Rica led the discussion on Hawksbill products illegal trade, resulting in the adoption of an updated Resolution for the Conservation of Hawksbill Turtles (document number is preliminary). Changes in the Resolution were about the countries strengthening their measures to monitor and control hawksbill turtles products trafficking in the Parties. Also proposed by Costa Rica, the COP discussed the IAC support to a Resolution to develop an international instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in international waters, outside national jurisdictions. Such a discussion resulted in the preparation of a declaration that would be submitted to the Chair of the Resolution Working Group (Brazil) leading the matter in the United Nations UNCLOS, preferably next July 14. Due to the time that would take to consult each government, this work was carried out intersessional. The declaration text was reviewed by legal advisors from the United States and once they send it to the IAC Secretariat *PT*, the document will be circulated once again for final approval of the IAC Parties.

The Secretariat *PT* presented the Resolution on Finances 2017-2019 which includes the budget for the Special Fund for the operation of the Convention and the status of volunteer contributions (2010-2017). The countries that have contributed to the IAC are Chile, Costa Rica, Caribbean Netherlands, Honduras, Panama, Mexico, and the United States. Recent in-kind support provided by Brazil and Argentina as hosts of meetings was highlighted. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, which is the IAC fiscal agent was presented for renewal. The United States suggested changes in the text of the MoU, followed by the adoption of the Resolution on Finances and the MoU CIT-COP8-2017-Inf.2

Results of the election of the Consultative Committee of Experts Sectorial members for the period 2017 -2019:

NGOs Sector: Rebecca Regnery, Diego Amorocho and Alejandro Fallabrino.

Scientific Sector: Maria Ángela Marcovaldi, Luciano Ponce, Eduardo Cuevas and Bryan Wallace as substitute.

Private/Productive Sector: Humberto Becerra Batista and Nina Pardo Antúnez.

It was agreed that the IAC Focal Points would propose and vote to fill the vacancy in the productive sector. Brazil recommended including the hotel sector in this vacancy.

Mr. Marco Favero, Executive Secretary of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) presented the Memorandum of Understanding signed on December 2016 with the IAC, and potential activities to be carried out within its framework. Highlighted areas of synergy are:

Seabirds/Sea Turtles Incidental Mortality:

- a) Seeking for effective solutions/mitigation
- b) Deficiency in bycatch data recording by RFMOs
- c) Assistance to the observer's programs
- d) Issues reporting bycatch

Plastics at Sea

- a) Conservation, outreach and extension measures

It was agreed that the IAC Scientific and Consultative Committees would edit the document including elements of synergy to be presented at ACAP's MOP in 2018.

Mr. René Vélez, from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), presented the Agenda 2030 Goals on Sustainable Development, highlighting Goal 14 which establishes the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for the sustainable development, and how the IAC could contribute to it.

There was a special recognition to the work and contributions by the IAC members Mr. Isaías Majil (Belize Focal Point) and Mr. Les Hodgson (CCE Productive Sector) who passed away in 2016, and 2017, respectively. Delegates from the United States, Belize (via video), Mexico and Panama mentioned their colleague's significant contributions to sea turtle conservation in their home countries, to the IAC, and the importance of their legacy.

The COP Chair requested the delegates to propose the host of the 9th Conference of the Parties (COP9). Guatemala proposed to host the COP9 to the consideration of the meeting. The generous offer was accepted and welcomed by all the Parties present. It was approved that the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties will be held in Guatemala in 2019, tentatively during the third week of June.

During the election of the COP9 Chair, Argentina proposed Mr. Antonio de Nichilo to continue for two more years. The delegate from Guatemala requested the Parties to approve the proposal, which was accepted and Mr. Nichilo was named COP9 Chair. Requests to propose a Vice-Chair concluded in Guatemala, as the host country of the COP9, to take the position. Guatemala could not accept immediately as he would consult with his Focal Point. Peru proposed the United State as the second option in case Guatemala couldn't accept, and the United States accepted the nomination.

Argentina's Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development Undersecretary provided the closing remarks and thanked the Parties for their participation, highlighting the importance of placing Argentina as a country where sea turtles are protected, by doing important events like these reflecting the collaboration among several nations.