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IAC NEWS BULLETIN

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION (IATTC) FOSTERS COOPERATION WITH THE IAC



On May 5 - 6, 2017, the IAC Secretary *Pro Tempore*, Ms. Veronica Caceres, and the delegate of the United States for the IAC Scientific Committee, Dr. Jeffrey Seminoff, participated in the 7th Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) Working Group on Bycatch, in La Jolla, CA. (Photo: Y. Swimmer)

During the IAC delegates' presentation, Ms. Caceres outlined the technical collaboration eased by the Memorandum of Understanding between these organizations, through cooperation by exchanging expertise, techniques, and knowledge relevant to the conservation of sea turtles. Dr. Seminoff presented the document CIT-CC8-2011-Tec.1:

Conservation Status and habitat use of sea turtles in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. Strategic actions for the conservation of the critically endangered Eastern Pacific leatherback were also discussed, including 1) Reduce bycatch of adult and sub-adult leatherback turtles in fisheries; 2) Identify areas of high interaction with fisheries, seeking management alternatives to reduce

interactions in this areas; 3) define and protect important areas for the leatherback turtle survival in different life stages; 4) Eliminate any consumption and illegal use of the leatherback turtle, including parts and derivatives, as well as all kinds of capture, transportation and trade; and 5) Nesting sites protection.

As a result, the IATTC Working Group on Bycatch recommended fostering cooperation with the IAC, and in particular:

- i. Strengthen cooperation between the two organizations in marine turtle protection activities; continue to invite the IAC to participate in the IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee and recommend that the IATTC participates in relevant meetings of the IAC.
- ii. To recommend that IATTC and IAC Secretariats work together to continue supporting training in best practices for safe handling and release of marine turtles caught incidentally.
- iii. Encourage sea turtle bycatch mitigation experimentations, for example through using nets illumination and reducing the time that nets are submerged.
- iv. Encourage the IATTC to collaborate with the IAC scientific committee to identify bycatch hotspots in leatherback inter-nesting areas.

Between May 8 and 12, Ms. Veronica Caceres, participated as an observer in the IATTC 8th Meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), right after the aforementioned meeting. During the SAC meeting, the recommendations of the Working Group on Bycatch were approved and will be presented at the IATTC 92nd Commission Meeting.

PARTICIPATION OF THE IAC SECRETARY *PT* IN THE 37TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION (LAS VEGAS, USA



Veronica Caceres, IAC Secretary *PT* presenting the East Pacific leatherback conservation efforts

From April 15-20, the International Sea Turtle Society carried out its 37th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation at the JW Marriott Las Vegas Resort & Spa. Thematic sessions included: anatomy, physiology, and health; in-water biology; nesting biology; population biology and monitoring; fisheries and threats; conservation, management and policy; education, outreach and advocacy; and social, economic and cultural studies. Special theme sessions were: sea turtles of the Eastern Pacific ocean; climate change, oil spills, and plastic pollution; and the ASO network.

The 3rd workshop of the Eastern Pacific Leatherback Network (LaudOPO) was carried out during the symposium organized by Bryan Wallace and Velkiss Gadea. The IAC Secretary *Pro Tempore*, Veronica Caceres, presented the results on the compliance with the IAC Resolution CIT-COP7-2015-R2 on the conservation of the Eastern Pacific leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*). The resolution is applicable in eight of the IAC 15 Party Countries of the Inter- American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles. The compliance analysis shows that implementation of conservation plans to protect the leatherbacks increased in 2016

and that countries such as Costa Rica, Chile, Mexico, and the United States continue their efforts to save the species. During her intervention, Ms. Caceres presented the activity to raise awareness in fishermen from foraging areas. The activity involved a visit of four Peruvian fishermen to a leatherback nesting beach in Mexico, to enhance their experience with leatherbacks assisting nesting beaches monitoring. Also, the secretary presented the recommendations from the IAC Eastern Pacific Leatherback Task Force as mitigation measures to reduce the threats that have brought the species to the brink of extinction.

EASTERN PACIFIC LEATHERBACK NETWORK (Laud OPO), TOGETHER FOR THE LEATHERBACK TURTLE RECOVERY

Written by: LaudOPO Network
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Since the re-launching of the Eastern Pacific Leatherback Network (LaudOPO) during the Second Workshop sponsored by Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and with the participation of more than 25 partners from Chile through the United States, at the 36th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation in Lima, Peru; this group of experts, non-governmental organization, and the IAC, have continued to meet with the common purpose of starting a new stage of a comprehensive regional effort focused on the conservation of the Eastern Pacific Leatherback Turtle, a population critically endangered to extinction. This effort supports the Eastern Pacific

Leatherback Action Plan developed in 2013.

Following the third meeting organized by the National Protected Areas Commission (CONANP in Spanish) in Mexico City in June 2016, and the most recent, carried out within the framework of the 37th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation (April 15th, 2017 in Las Vegas) and sponsored by FFI, important progress for the last two years was noted:

- A standardized regional platform has been established to share data on nesting turtles, production of hatchlings, bycatch, strandings, and turtles identification tags.
- Coordination and communication between countries have gained dynamism, thanks to different methods of monitoring the integration of activities strengthening the regional network named “Eastern Pacific Leatherback Network (LaudOPO)”.
- The data to be collected in the region, the terms of reference for the membership and for sharing and using data have been established, and a website has been developed.
- Funding for two projects, one focused on nesting beaches and another one on bycatch, was an achievement for strengthening a between-countries coordinated work with a regional objective.
- Simultaneously, LaudOPO continues focusing its efforts in conservation at a site and country levels, such as nests protection, increasing production of hatchlings, and reduction of bycatch.
- Colleagues from Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Colombia, were trained on bycatch rapid assessment methods, allowing researchers to obtain a great amount of baseline data about small scale fishing and bycatch – or catches of other non-targeted species – in large areas in a relatively short period of time. The training provided by ProDelphinus colleagues is already bearing fruit.

Specific recommendations and actions for the recovery of the Eastern Pacific Leatherback have been generated during LaudOPO network members meetings. Likewise, the coordination and participation of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) in the workshops, allows appropriate synergies for the authorities of the IAC Parties to endorse the priorities and promote the commitment of the members with these actions. This process has included the participation of Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States.

RESEARCH SEEKS TO CHANGE THE TYPE OF HOOKS USED IN LONGLINE FISHERIES TO REDUCE SEA TURTLES BYCATCH IN ARICA, CHILE

Written by: ©SUBPESCA

Source: <http://www.subpesca.gob.cl>

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Photo: ©SUBPESCA Chile

A team from Chile's Subpesca Fisheries and Aquaculture Zonal Direction and professionals from the Fishing Development Institute (IFOP in Spanish) met with Arica's Artisanal Fishermen Union to study the potential of exchanging "J" hooks for circular hooks in pomfret longline fisheries to reduce sea turtles bycatch.

Ms. Patricia Zarate from IFOP explained that "pomfret fishing in Chile is carried out with "J" hooks which are easily swallowed by sea turtles" regarding the intended exchange of "J" hooks for circular hooks in Arica, in order to reduce sea turtles bycatch. "An Arica's longline fishery has a high sea turtle bycatch. These are species threatened with extinction, with severe conservation issues and listed in CITES Appendix I. Therefore mitigation measures are required to reduce their bycatch and mortality" stated the expert.

She added that "there are many studies throughout the world showing that circle hooks reduce the catch and mortality of sea turtles, as they get hook superficially reducing the risk of dealing with sea turtles that have swallowed them and increasing survival."

Mr. Marco Soto, fisheries and aquaculture zonal director, highlighted Arica's Artisanal Fishermen Union initiative to change the hooks they use during their fishing operations to reduce sea turtles bycatch, which had been discussed for several months in Arica's

Sea Turtle Regional board. This species is listed in CITES Appendix I, requiring mitigation measures to reduce their bycatch and mortality. IFOP's support to carry out this research was critical given its highly qualified professionals in this matter.

Zarate also highlighted that the "aim is to exchange "J" hooks, easily swallowed by sea turtles and highlighted that "the idea came directly from the fishermen, which is very valuable as they are highly interested in reducing sea turtles bycatch. It is important to mention that the most important aggregation of sea turtles takes place in Arica, and their protection is critical for a very valuable area in terms of biodiversity and tourism".

"This research is very important for Chile, as a response to the international commitments with the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and

Conservation of Sea Turtles of evaluating methods to reduce sea turtles bycatch. The results could be positive in reducing sea turtles bycatch, but negative for fishermen if these circle hooks reduce the pomfret catch or if there is an increasing catch of other non-target species with conservation issues. If the latter two are true and even if sea turtle bycatch is reduced, the hooks couldn't be exchanged. In that case, and with the collaboration of the fishing sector, we need to strengthen handling and release measures to increase sea turtles survival in this fishery"

Another organization taking part in this project is NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA/NMFS) with the participation of Dr. Yonat Swimmer who has led several hook exchange studies in Brazil, Costa Rica, and Uruguay. Dr. Yonat will donate the circle hooks required for this research.

THE EASTERN PACIFIC LEATHERBACK HAS ITS OWN POSTAGE STAMP IN COSTA RICA



Las Baulas Marine National Park is one of the main nesting sites for the Eastern Pacific Leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), whose population is critically endangered. The Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) celebrates and support the efforts of those advocating for presenting the situation of this species to the world.

This is the case of Costa Rica Mail Service and their joint effort with the National System of Conservation Areas and Foundation Marviva to release 40 thousand Leatherback turtle stamps. The stamps illustrated by Cristian Ramirez, embossed and varnished to emphasize the leatherback image have a face value of ₡ 1370 (USD 2,45) and ₡ 2100 (USD 3,76) and went available on August 24th, 2016.

By releasing the stamps, Costa Rica Mail Service restates its commitment to environmental protection, showing the natural wonders protected in the country to the world, and raising awareness on the serious condition of the Eastern Pacific leatherback and the importance of preserving their habitat.



Las Baulas Marine National Park management team with their stamp

PERUVIAN FISHERMEN SHARED WITH THEIR FELLOW FISHERMEN AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THEIR COMMUNITY THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH EASTERN PACIFIC NESTING LEATHERBACKS IN MEXICO



Orlando Carrillo (Left) and Martín Macedas (Right) sharing their experience in Mexico's leatherback nesting beaches, with their fellow fishermen.

Within the framework of the project “Capacity building for fishermen to create awareness and promote conservation of East Pacific leatherback turtles” funded by the US Fisheries and Wildlife Service Marine Turtle Conservation Fund and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC), the Peruvian fishermen who experienced sighting Eastern Pacific leatherbacks nesting in Mexico in January 2017 ([see IAC News Bulletin No. 30](#)) complied with the second phase of the project sharing their experience with their community.

Aiming to replicate the awareness for the conservation of the leatherback, between April 24 to 28, the fishermen who visited the nesting beaches in Mexico, shared with their fellow fishermen and other members of their community the experience and knowledge developed during their trip. During the workshops, there was an active interaction and a positive reaction from northern Peru fishermen. Additionally, talks were given at regional educational institutions such as the Technological Fishing Institute “*Contralmirante Manuel Villar Olivera*” to communicate the issue and raise awareness among the students.

The workshops took place at *Los Organos* fishing center, *Máncora* landing point hall, and *Acapulco* and *Zorritos* landing points. Nearly 80 fishermen learned about the experience of Martín Macedas and Orlando Carrillo, who supported by Peru's Institute of the Sea (IMARPE in Spanish), produced a favorable interaction with the

community sharing the importance of their involvement in the conservation of the Eastern Pacific leatherback. These activities comply with the strategic actions proposed in the IAC Resolution CIT- COP-2015-R2 for the conservation of the Eastern Pacific Leatherback Turtle establishing the reduction of bycatch promoting exchange between fishermen.

RECOMMENDED PUBLICATIONS

Mazaris, A. D., Almpandou, V., Wallace, B. P., Pantis, J. D., & Schofield, G. (2014). A global gap analysis of sea turtle protection coverage. *Biological conservation*, 173, 17-23.

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