



Participants of the 10th IAC Consultative Committee of Experts Meeting / Videoconference

Tenth Meeting of the IAC Consultative Committee of Experts

The 10th meeting of the IAC Consultative Committee of Experts (CCE10) was held on February 15, 2017, by videoconference from the IAC Secretariat *Pro Tempore* office at the US Fish and Wildlife Service Headquarters in Virginia. The meeting was attended by delegates from eleven (11) Member Countries and four (4) sectorial members representing NGOs, Scientific, and Private sectors. Using video conference allowed the participation of 35 delegates.

The CCE Work Plan 2017-2018 was updated, and the recommendations from the Eastern Pacific Leatherback Task Force were revised. These recommendations will be presented for consideration to the IAC Conference of the Parties this year. The recommendations include urgent conservation actions that countries within the range of distribution of the species could implement to mitigate the threats they face, among them is to convene national workshops with decision makers in each country to discuss and agree on measures to implement locally to help reduce leatherback threats. Progress in the implementation of the Resolution on exceptions in Costa Rica, Guatemala and Panama was discussed, and the recommendations from the IAC Scientific Committee for the monitoring of the olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) population in Central America, considering that the exception applies exclusively to this species. Finally, the Committee made recommendations on potential activities to be carried out under the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding recently signed between the IAC and the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP).

The Consultative Committee honored the memory of two of its members, Mr. Les Hudson (USA), member of the Industry Sector, and Mr. Isaias Majil, Belize's Focal Point, who passed away in 2016 and 2017 respectively. The IAC family will remember and miss them dearly for their valuable contribution and dedicated effort on behalf of sea turtle conservation.



The IAC Promoted Exchange of Experiences Between Peruvian Fishermen and Conservation Stakeholders Involved in the Conservation of the Eastern Pacific Leatherback Turtle at Index Nesting Beaches in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Peruvian fishermen José Fiestas, Martín Macedas, Orlando Carrillo and Pedro Alejos arrived in Mexico with the representative of Peru's Sea Institute (IMARPE in Spanish) and IAC Scientific Committee delegate of Peru, Mr. Javier Quiñones, to have a unique experience with leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) at the index nesting beach Barra de la Cruz (State of Oaxaca). The fishermen came from different areas of Peru where there are reports of interactions of gillnets with the leatherbacks foraging in these waters, which can result in incidental catches. The criteria to select the fishermen was: 1) Fishermen using gillnets, which seem to have a higher interaction with sea turtles, 2) fishing in areas with the highest abundance of leatherbacks in Peruvian waters, and 3) leadership of the candidates in their community to ensure that the experience and knowledge brought from nesting beaches would be replicated and shared with their communities. The activity took place on January 22 – 27, 2017 as part of the project "Capacity building for fishermen to create awareness and promote conservation of East Pacific leatherback turtles", promoted by the IAC Secretariat PT to support the implementation of the Resolution on the conservation of the Eastern Pacific leatherback turtle.



Group photo during the activity. Peruvian fishermen and representatives from IMARPE (Peru), CONANP and INAPESCA (Mexico).

Guided by the National Commission for Natural Protected Areas of Mexico (CONANP in Spanish) representatives Dr. Laura Sarti, the biologist Alejandro Tavera, and their sea turtle conservation and monitoring team based in Barra de la Cruz, the fishermen participated in night monitoring and patrolling on the nesting beach. CONANP's staff shared presentations on leatherback biology, migration, critical size of the population, connectivity between Peru and Mexico, and the importance of the species protection in Peru's feeding grounds. The first night, the group was amazed when they encountered their first leatherback turtle nesting. They took part in the nest relocation at the

hatchery. The following morning, they had the opportunity to release olive ridley and leatherback hatchlings. Also, the group had the opportunity to observe other nesting leatherbacks during the four nights of beach patrols, as well as hatchlings release.

The Peruvian fishermen visited the Mexican Turtle Center (CMT in Spanish) at Mazunte, where Dr. Heriberto Santana from the National Fisheries Institute in Mexico (INAPESCA in Spanish) and delegate of Mexico for the IAC Scientific Committee, trained them on best practices to handle and release sea turtles incidentally caught. The fishermen also shared time with their fellow Mexican artisanal fishers such as Mr. Sanson Audelo and his son, who spoke about their experience with circular hooks and described the fishing system in their area of Puerto Angel. It was a very friendly interaction between fishermen from both countries, and the moment allowed them to talk about the sea turtle safe release techniques used in each of their home countries.



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The activity included a visit to La Escobilla, the world’s most important nesting beach for olive ridleys (*L. olivacea*) and where arrivals of between 800,000 and 1’000’000 individuals are recorded. Ms. Tere Luna and Ms. Erika Peralta from CONANP explained how the process of transformation of the local community from sea turtle eggs poachers to guardians of the sea turtles had occurred. There was great empathy between the members of the community and the visiting fishermen.

The fishermen returned to Peru moved by the experience and expressed their commitment to sharing with their communities back home their new knowledge on the importance of their role in the survival of the East Pacific leatherbacks.

This activity was organized by the IAC Secretariat *Pro Tempore* with the financial support of the US Fish and Wildlife Service/Marine Turtle Conservation Fund through the project “Capacity building for fishermen to create awareness and promote conservation of East Pacific leatherback turtles”. The implementation of the activity also had financial and technical support from the National Commission for Natural Protected Areas of Mexico (CONANP), the National Fisheries Institute of Mexico (INAPESCA) and from Peru Sea Institute (IMARPE).

IAC Presented the Eastern Pacific Leatherback Turtle's Critical Status at CBD Sustainable Ocean Initiative Workshop



MSc. Rotney Piedra, presenting the IAC conservation efforts for Leatherback turtles.

At the Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) Capacity-Building Workshop for the Wider Caribbean, and Central America, carried out on February 20 – 24, 2017 in San José, Costa Rica, the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) Consultative Committee of Experts delegate from Costa Rica, and Manager of the Leatherback National Park Mr. Rotney Piedra, gave a presentation on the IAC regional efforts on behalf of the Eastern Pacific Leatherback Turtle. This population is critically endangered.

The Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) is a global platform that aims to build partnerships and enhance capacity to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in marine and coastal areas. Therefore, the workshop organized by the CBD Secretariat and Costa Rica's Ministry of Environment and Energy aimed to enhance the capacity of countries in the region to conserve and sustainably use marine and coastal biodiversity. The workshop focused on regional experiences and approaches supporting integrated marine and coastal management.

In his presentation "Regional Conservation Efforts of the Eastern Pacific Leatherback Turtle", Mr. Piedra stated the critical situation of this population. Information available shows that this is a highly migratory species with connectivity between nesting habitats and foraging areas in the high seas. Mr. Piedra highlighted that the information provided by Ms. Laura Sarti, from Mexico National Commission for Natural Protected Areas (CONANP in Spanish), shows a declining number of females in Mexico's index beaches, information consistent with a similar scenario in Costa Rica.

The IAC is implementing Resolution CIT-COP7-2015-R2 Conservation of the Eastern Pacific Leatherback Turtle, by strategic actions recommended as a priority such as bycatch reduction in fisheries; identification of areas of high interaction with fisheries; protect important areas for leatherback survival; eliminate any consumption and illegal use of the leatherback turtle, and protection of nesting sites. Recently the IAC recommended organizing national workshops in the range countries to agree and prioritize threat mitigation measures, the recommendations from those workshops will be presented to decision makers to be implemented. Similarly to the IAC, the regional network LaudOPO shares the commitment to promote the conservation of the Eastern Pacific Leatherbacks.

Costa Rica carries out monitoring and research programs at index beaches as well as in secondary beaches, led by NGOs, universities, civil society and SINAC. Recently, Costa Rica drafted the Protocol for Environmental Monitoring of Sea Turtle Nesting Beaches. In addition, the capacity building activity “Best Practices and Techniques to increase survival of sea turtles incidentally caught in Costa Rican fisheries” was carried out in 2016, with the IAC Secretariat PT support. Currently, Costa Rica is in the process to create a Commission for the Conservation and Protection of Sea Turtles, and two expert’s workshops about the situation of the species in Costa Rica have been conducted.

It is urgent to change the current status of the leatherback turtle; this depends not only on the national efforts of each country but also on regional efforts. The strengthening of partnerships between the IAC and other conventions or initiatives such as the CBD-SOI is necessary and critical.

Workshop “Best Practices for Safe Handling and Release to Improve Survival of Sea Turtles Incidentally Caught in Fishing Gear in Costa Rica”

The workshop on best practices for safe handling and release to improve survival of sea turtles incidentally caught in fishing gear in Costa Rica was organized by the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE in Spanish), the Costa Rican Fishing and Aquaculture Institute (INCOPECA, in Spanish), IAC Secretariat PT, SUBMON (Spain) and ECOPACIFIC on March 2016.

Fishermen involved in longline, gillnets and shrimp fisheries were trained by Dr. Mariluz Parga from SUBMON consultancy firm. Participants received tools for safe sea turtle handling such as line cutters, nets to bring sea turtles on board and dehookers. The workshop stressed the need to implement these practices in order to meet the market demands and regulations. Small sessions were carried out with fishermen whose fishing trips did not allow them to attend the main meeting.

NEW PUBLICATIONS



Orrego C. M. and Rodríguez. N (2017). The positive relationship between the Ostional community and the conservation of olive ridley sea turtles at Ostional National Wildlife Refuge, Costa Rica In: Westlund, L.; Charles, A.; Garcia S.; Sanders, J. (eds). 2017. Marine protected areas: Interactions with fishery livelihoods and food security. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 603. Rome, FAO (69-84). <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6742e.pdf>

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