



**Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation
of Sea Turtles**
10th Conference of the Parties
June 15-17, 2022 – Panama

Resolution CIT-COP10-2022-R4

**Exceptions under Article IV (3a and b) for Subsistence Harvesting of *Lepidochelys olivacea*
Eggs in Guatemala**

RECALLING that Article IV of the Convention, paragraph 2a requires Parties to prohibit the intentional capture, retention or killing of, and domestic trade in, sea turtles, their eggs, parts or products;

FURTHER RECALLING that Article IV, paragraph 3a states that each Party may allow exceptions to satisfy economic subsistence needs of traditional communities, taking into account the recommendations of the Consultative Committee of Experts established pursuant to Article VII, provided that such exceptions do not undermine efforts to achieve the objective of this Convention;

NOTING that the fifth Conference of Parties adopted the procedures for when exceptions exist (CIT-COP5-2011-R2);

CONSIDERING that *Lepidochelys olivacea* is classified as vulnerable, by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN);

ACKNOWLEDGING that all other species of sea turtles classified as “endangered, vulnerable and critically endangered” by IUCN must be protected from any negative impacts resulting from an exception;

RECOGNIZING that *Lepidochelys olivacea* on the beaches of the Eastern Pacific (Mexico to Panama) is the only turtle species that can withstand a carefully controlled amount of egg harvesting, and only when the population to be harvested has demonstrated the status of “recovered or verifiably stable”;

CONSIDERING that these extraction activities existed prior to Guatemala becoming a Party to the IAC, and today continue to be regulated by relevant governmental organizations;

RECOGNIZING that Guatemala has informed in its IAC Annual Reports over the last five years, sustained efforts in the implementation of the recommendations in Resolution CIT-COP6-2013-R1 on Exceptions under Article IV (3a and b) for Subsistence Harvesting of *Lepidochelys olivacea* Eggs in Guatemala and Panama;

RECOGNIZING that Guatemala has laws and regulations in place to support the implementation of the IAC resolution on exception, including the update to the Resolution on the Conservation quota of *Lepidochelys olivacea* eggs, that established a conservation quota of 20% of the eggs in each nest, based on the recommendation from the IAC Scientific Committee, and that Guatemala has expressed its intention to gradually increase this quota according to what the country's conditions allow;

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the recommendations to Guatemala by the IAC Scientific Committee and Consultative Committee of Experts at the 14th Meeting of the Consultative Committee of Experts (Meeting Report CIT-CCE14-2021-Doc.9), regarding Guatemala's five year report on the implementation of the Resolution CIT-COP6-2013-R1, that indicates that some protection measures in Guatemala have already been implemented, while other measures need to be evaluated for feasible implementation, and that it is necessary to develop separate Resolutions to the exceptions that are in accordance with the national reality of each country included in the initial Resolution;

CONSIDERING that to support the continuous implementation of conservation measures for the species in the exception, Guatemala has to finalize the process of preparing and establishing a management plan for the exception in accordance to IAC Article IV (3a and b) of IAC.

THE TENTH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES OF THE INTER-AMERICAN CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF SEA TURTLES RESOLVES THE FOLLOWING MEASURES TO GUATEMALA TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF ARTICLE IV (3) REGARDING EXCEPTIONS:

1. The Government of Guatemala (Protected Areas National Council – CONAP) commits to formally establish an Exception Management Plan for the Harvest of *Lepidochelys olivacea* Eggs, within a maximum of three (3) additional years, from the date this resolution is approved, based on the outline in Annex I of this resolution.
2. The Exception Management Plan should include the recommendations from the IAC Scientific Committee and Consultative Committee of Experts adopted at the 14th Consultative Committee of Experts Meeting in Annex II of this resolution.
3. Recommend that Guatemala applies the precautionary approach, in the interim, by implementing the protection and monitoring measures in Annex III of this resolution, in accordance with the national laws, and to Continue consulting with the IAC Scientific and Consultative Committees while the Country establishes its Exception Management Plan so that the exception meets the requirements in Article IV (3) of the Convention.
4. The level of *Lepidochelys olivacea* sea turtle eggs being harvested under an exception has to be proven to be sustainable; therefore, the monitoring protocols included in the Exception Management Plan, must be in place to assess the stability of the population in the long-term.

These protocols must include nesting trends in order to support the sustainability of the harvesting proposed.

5. Guatemala must continue to report on its exception in the IAC Annual Report.
6. The IAC Scientific and Consultative Committees will continue to review the progress of the implementation of this resolution and will report to the Conference of Parties on this progress, every five years.
7. Guatemala will present a draft of its Exception Management Plan to the IAC Scientific Committee in 2022. This proposal should be consulted with the Consultative Committee of Experts. Both Committees should provide a final review on the Exception Management Plan within the following four (4) months. Guatemala will take into account any final recommendations and modify the Exception Management Plan as applicable.
8. Once the Exception Management Plan is finalized and approved, it should be assessed every 5 years by the IAC Scientific Committee and Consultative Committee of Experts; thus Guatemala must prepare an Assessment Report for the Exception Management Plan with the status of implementation and compliance with the plan and report timely any modifications to the information presented.
9. The IAC Scientific Committee and Consultative Committee of Experts will develop a form with the minimum information and data contents to be included in the Assessment Report for the Exception Management Plan.
10. Urge the Government of Guatemala to according to their capabilities, secure and assign human and financial resources necessary for the implementation of the Exception Management Plan.

This resolution repeals and replaces the IAC Resolution on Exceptions under Article IV (3a and b) for Subsistence Harvesting of *Lepidochelys olivacea* eggs in Guatemala and Panama CIT-COP6-2013-R1 in its entirety.

ANNEX I – Recommended outline for Guatemala’s Exception Management Plan

1. State of knowledge (regarding the exception)
2. Area of implementation of the exception (study area)
 - a. Map with location of nesting beaches and hatcheries.
3. Species description (Biology and ecology)
 - a. Including nesting season, nesting peaks, size of nests (maximum, minimum, average), the month to month and annual register of nests, hatching success in hatcheries, among other data considered relevant.
4. Conservation status and threats in Guatemala
5. Conservation measures
 - a. Legal framework
 - b. Hatcheries
 - c. Conservation quota
6. Strategic Plan
 - a. Management plan objectives
 - b. Criteria to assess compliance with the objectives.
 - c. Best practices in hatcheries management
 - d. Olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) monitoring program in Guatemala Pacific Coast (Product 2 prepared by CONAP) – Include goals, timeline, and strategies.
 - e. Traceability program - Include goals, timeline, and strategies.
 - f. Current and future financial mechanisms
 - g. Success/sustainability indicators (environmental and socioeconomic)

ANNEX II – Recommendations from the IAC Scientific Committee and Consultative Committee of Experts

1. On the Exception Management Plan

It is recommended that, to manage the exception on Guatemala's Pacific Coast, the Protected Areas National Council organize and complete the information to be presented to the IAC, by the establishment of the Exception Management Plan, including at least the structure in Annex I, to be presented in one year at the 2022 Scientific Committee meeting.

2. On the Conservation Quota

It is recommended to report the production of hatchlings in hatcheries and using this as a base to estimate the percentage of hatching success to monitor what is happening at an embryonic scale with the 20% of the eggs from each nest, which is the conservation quota.

3. On Management of Nesting Beaches and the Population Monitoring Program

It is recommended to establish a method to monitor the indicators that determine the status of the *Lepidochelys olivacea* nesting population for enough time that allows for detection of variations in recruitment due to egg harvest. Two of the best indicators for population trends are the counting of nests, and counting of females, this is what needs to be monitored. If resources for monitoring all nesting beaches are not sufficient, index beaches with higher nesting should be prioritized.

It is recommended to ensure that the minimum data collection methods are standardized annually, so that data can be compared among years. Similarly, there should be an effort to differentiate between nests (with eggs inside) and false crawls on the index beaches.

It is recommended to continue the activity described above monitoring nesting tracks on the index beaches for at least another five years, with daily nesting surveys in established areas within the reproductive season.

It is requested that, for both the Exception Management Plan and the Assessment Report on the Exception Management Plan presented to the IAC, include an analysis of the nest and egg collection effort with the variables that influence it, such as the availability of financial resources, increased effort of volunteering, an increase in the purchase of eggs from hatcheries, among other reasons.

It is recommended to establish management measures for the conservation quota and for hatcheries for the period between January and June, as during these months, outside the peak in nesting activity there is an almost total collection of eggs by the community.

It is recommended, to the extent possible to include in the Exception Management Plan a strategy where entire nests are protected and monitored *in situ* on a feasible protected section of the beach, prioritizing those beaches with higher nesting numbers (south-east section of the coast). As an

alternative, it is recommended to carry out *in situ* nest protection during the rainy months, when temperatures are favorable for hatching success, as a measure to offset harvest along the coast.

4. On Hatcheries Management

It is recommended that the number of nests collected per collector is recorded and used as a condition for *parlameros* (collectors) to receive their payment for the eggs, and to then obtain an estimate of the number of nests harvested on the different beaches.

It is recommended that the Exception Management Plan and the progress report, include the following indicators: hatching success, and the total number of hatchlings released to the marine environment.

It is recommended to record a representative sample of temperature data in nests (two or more years) to compare *in situ* temperatures with *ex situ* (nests relocated in hatcheries) temperatures in the nests in the rainy and dry seasons.

It is recommended to estimate the ratio of females to males produced in the hatcheries, using dead hatchling and an incubation temperature analysis to determine a correlation between mortality and sex, if there is bias to one of the sexes, apply mitigation measures.

5. On Social and Economic Sustainability and the search for economic alternative activities to sea turtle eggs harvest

It is recommended to include in the exception management plan and the exception progress report to the IAC, the social and economic income trends over time (sustainability indicators).

It is recommended to design a budget indicating the resources required to keep control and surveillance of *arribada* events, harvest, and trade of eggs.

6. On Traceability

It is recommended to include in the exception management plan a traceability procedure for both the eggs collected for consumption and the eggs going to hatcheries, to establish the number of clutches and the number of eggs commercially traded.

It is recommended to maintain a record of sea turtle eggs seizures and a temporal analysis using indicators (for example: number of eggs seized due to poaching, number of sanctions, inspection coverage, percentage of prosecutions, and others) to estimate the number of eggs illegally traded and to assess how this impacts *Lepidochelys olivacea* population.

It is recommended to engage in an Exchange of experiences between the technical personnel in charge of exceptions in Costa Rica, Panama and Guatemala to share protocols on the subject of traceability of eggs collected within the framework of the exception.

ANNEX III – Recommendations presented by the Protected Areas National Council (CONAP)

- Continue monitoring nesting tracks on the Pacific coast of Guatemala in the seven beaches monitored. If, due to financial constraints, it is not possible to maintain nesting tracks monitoring at all sites, nesting monitoring of Hawaii should be maintained, as it is the site with the longest time frame of monitoring, from which useful extrapolations can be made.
- Assess the relationship between the movements of the Central American Thermal Dome with respect to the observed gradient of greater nesting in the eastern Pacific coast of Guatemala.
- Strengthen management of the hatcheries on the Pacific coast as they prove to be an effective conservation tool for sea turtles in the country.
- Update the conservation quota receipts that should include a section identifying the number of eggs, the number of nests from which the eggs were collected, the means of obtaining (purchase, exchange), the collection beach, and other relevant information.”
- CONAP must ensure that the minimum conservation quota of 20% is met throughout the year and not only during the nesting season (July-December), in those sites where nesting occurs throughout the year. For this, it is essential that the hatcheries can receive eggs throughout the year, or at least those hatcheries managed directly by CONAP, as well as the hatcheries of El Banco and Hawaii. Other hatcheries administrators should report the nests that they receive during the year.
- CONAP should provide training in the management of the hatcheries, so that they properly fill out the conservation quota receipts for olive ridley eggs use in all their three sections.
- CONAP must verify at the final point of sale (restaurants, ceviche eateries, etc.) of olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) eggs that sellers have their respective proof of final delivery that ensures the legal source of the eggs.
- Considering that the annual amount allocated by the hatcheries to purchase eggs for conservation is around Q500,000 -USD 64,880 (estimated)- it would be feasible for CONAP to negotiate a conservation incentives program for the collectors, which funds are exclusively for hatcheries to purchase eggs for conservation. This would bring several benefits since that money would start an economic spillover effect among the coastal communities of the Pacific Coast and would enable hatcheries to invest their income from hatchling releases and donations in improving and maintaining hatchery infrastructure, purchasing priority equipment for monitoring, and investing in other sea turtle conservation activities.
- The implementation of these recommendations must be documented and analyzed to be included as part of the Annual Report to the IAC.