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## COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

### Twenty-sixth Session

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## OUTCOME OF THE TECHNICAL CONSULTATION ON SEA TURTLES CONSERVATION AND FISHERIES BANGKOK, THAILAND, 29 NOVEMBER - 2 DECEMBER 2004

### SUMMARY

This document reports on the conclusions and recommendations reached by the FAO Technical Consultation on Sea Turtles Conservation and Fisheries. The full report is available as document COFI/2005/Inf.15. The Committee is invited to consider the conclusions and recommendations of the Technical Consultation and to advise on their implementation.

### INTRODUCTION

1. There are seven species of sea turtles worldwide, distributed mainly in tropical and subtropical areas. Sea turtles are impacted by a number of natural and man-induced factors, including fishing operations and, as a result, all sea turtle species are now considered as threatened or endangered. Because of the concern on the status of sea turtles and the possible negative effects of fishing on these populations, the Twenty-fifth Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI)<sup>1</sup> raised the question of sea turtles

<sup>1</sup>FAO. Report of the twenty-fifth session of the Committee on Fisheries. Rome, 24–28 February 2003. FAO Fisheries Report. No. 702. Rome, FAO. 2003. 88p. Also available in electronic form online from: <http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/006/y5025e/Y5025E00.pdf>

conservation and interactions with fishing operations and agreed that “while taking into consideration existing work on sea turtle interactions and conservation, a Technical Consultation, should be held in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2004”.

2. An Expert Consultation on Interactions between Sea Turtles and Fisheries within an Ecosystem Context was convened by FAO and held in Rome, 9 to 12 March 2004, to prepare the required background information for consideration by the Technical Consultation.

### **ORGANIZATION AND OUTCOME OF THE TECHNICAL CONSULTATION**

3. The Technical Consultation on Sea Turtles Conservation and Fisheries was convened at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, from 29 November to 2 December 2004. It was attended by 28 members of FAO and by observers from three intergovernmental and four international non-governmental organizations. The report of the Technical Consultation is available as document COFI/2005/Inf.15.

4. The Technical Consultation was requested to address the major issues with regards to sea turtles conservation and fisheries with special emphasis on: (i) current status of sea turtles conservation and factors affecting the mortality of sea turtles; (ii) fishing gears and techniques to reduce sea turtle mortality; (iii) development of guidelines to reduce sea turtle mortality; (iv) assistance to members from developing countries for the conservation of sea turtles, and (v) future directions for global work on sea turtles conservation and fisheries.

5. Various major hazards or threats affecting sea turtle viability were recognized, including those due to incidental catch in fishing operations. Although serious attempts are being made to better understand the relative impact of these different threats, and particularly the seriousness of fisheries-related impacts on sea turtle mortality, it was generally agreed that there was a need for further improving the information basis and for better cooperation and exchange of information.

6. The Consultation pointed out that a range of different management options and tools were either available or under experimentation that could be used to reduce mortality of sea turtles from interaction with fisheries. Special reference was made to the use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) and its successful implementation, especially where there has been fishers involvement. However, in developing countries, difficulties were experienced in introducing these type of devices, especially in small-scale fisheries and it was stressed that the socio-economic impact needs to be considered.

7. There has also been promising results in pelagic longline fisheries including replacement of traditional J-hooks by circle hooks and the need to expand these studies to other geographic areas was stressed. The need for more research on stationary coastal gear, in order to estimate the impact of such gears on sea turtle populations, was also highlighted.

8. The Consultation recommended that FAO develops Technical Guidelines for the reduction of sea turtle mortality due to fishing, to be broad in scope and global in nature, while Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs) should take the role of making them more specific to their regions.

9. The Consultation reviewed two proposals provided to the meeting by Japan and the USA, respectively. These proposals consisted of possible outlines for guidelines to reduce incidental sea turtle mortality due to fisheries. The two documents were successively

merged and further contributions included to formulate the Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations (COFI/2005/Inf.15, Appendix E), and endorsed by the Technical Consultation. It was agreed that the Guidelines produced by the Technical Consultation could be used as input to the development of Technical Guidelines by FAO as well as guidance for national or multilateral sea turtle conservation and management measures.

10. The issue on the current status of sea turtle conservation and management in developing countries received special attention, particularly with regard to socio-economic and cultural considerations. The need for both financial and technical support to developing countries for the implementation of activities aimed at reducing sea turtle mortality due to fisheries was also highlighted. The establishment of a voluntary fund in support of these activities was suggested.

### **SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMITTEE**

11. The Committee is invited to review the outcome of the Technical Consultation on Sea Turtles Conservation and Fisheries and to provide guidance with regard to the direction and scope of future work. In particular, the Committee is invited to consider the following recommendations of the Technical Consultation and advise on their implementation:

12. Recommendations for FAO to:

- (a) Develop Technical Guidelines for the reduction of sea turtle mortalities in fishing operations, based on the “Guidelines to reduce sea turtle mortality in fishing operations” (COFI/2005/Inf.15, Appendix E) drafted and agreed by the Consultation.
- (b) Provide technical and other assistance for the implementation of measures to reduce sea turtle mortality in fishing operations, especially for developing countries.
- (c) Conduct workshops to: (i) promote the consistent understanding of the overall picture of global and regional sea turtle conservation and management efforts, regional fisheries, fishing gears and mitigation options, and (ii) review progress on implementing mitigation measures to reduce turtle mortality.
- (d) Strengthen linkages between national and international environmental and fisheries management agencies in the conservation and management of sea turtle populations.
- (e) Report on: (i) global sea turtle stock status and trends, and (ii) review progress on the implementation of mitigation strategies biennially to COFI and include updated information on its website.
- (f) Compile technical handling and release guidelines and manuals and distribute widely to Member States.
- (g) Coordinate research to include:
  - Standards for conducting research, including description of gear and appropriate experimental designs
  - Better sea turtle stock identification and assessment of interactions with fisheries
  - Use of observer programmes and coastal communities for collecting information

- International research programmes using tagging and genetic studies
  - Testing of mitigation techniques in different regions
- (h) Establish and maintain a website serving as a clearing house for information on (f) and (g) above.
- (i) Facilitate the harmonization of national legislation relevant to sea turtle conservation and management.
- (j) Initiate the necessary action to attract the Extrabudgetary Funding (EBF) that might be required to implement the recommendations mentioned above.
13. Recommendations for RFBs to:
- (a) Pay urgent attention to the issue of interactions between fisheries and sea turtles, especially in regard to the collection of statistics on bycatch and fisheries interactions and the adoption of mitigation measures.
- (b) Develop networks with a view to sharing information on mitigation measures adopted and experiences undertaken at national, regional and global levels.
14. Recommendations for FAO Member Countries to:
- (a) Pay urgent attention to the sea turtle stocks and areas identified of greatest threat (as specified in TC:STCF/2004/3) and paragraph 11 of the Report of the Technical Consultation (COFI/2005/Inf.15).
- (b) Give consideration to the implementation of the elements outlined in the “Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations” as agreed in the Technical Consultation (COFI/2005/Inf.15, Appendix E).
- (c) Cooperate to broaden the mandates of RFBs to reduce the impacts of fishing on sea turtle populations.
- (d) Collect and make available, data and information on trends in sea turtle-fishery interactions, including trends in fishery-related mortalities.
- (e) Support the initiatives with respect to sea turtle conservation and fisheries interactions that FAO will develop, and in particular those member countries in a position to do so, mobilize the necessary funding for their implementation.
15. Recommendations for All to:
- (a) Collaborate in considering the adoption and implementation of the guidelines, with special consideration to: (i) fishing operations; (ii) research, monitoring and sharing of information; (iii) ensuring policy consistency; (iv) education and training; (v) capacity building, and (vi) socio-economic and cultural considerations, as outlined in the “Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations” (COFI/2005/Inf.15, Appendix E).
- (b) Harmonize sea turtle conservation and management initiatives within regions.
- (c) Promotion, as appropriate, of participation in regional sea turtle conservation and management arrangements with a view to cooperate on sea turtle conservation and management.