

Response from IUCN: Dhamra Port project: the role of the International Union for Conservation of Nature

The Dhamra Port Company Limited (DPCL) in Orissa, India, has requested the advice of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to mitigate the impact of the port's development on the Olive Ridley Turtles. In fulfilling that role, IUCN has been receiving enquiries and questions about its overall involvement in the project. This brief clarifies the nature and extent of IUCN's role.

The Dhamra Port project was conceived several years ago and project development is in progress following Indian government approval. The project is located in close proximity to turtle conservation areas. The potential impact of the project on the turtles has been a matter of concern to environmental organizations, and thus a subject of extensive debate. In 2006, after the project had been approved and development was underway, DPCL invited IUCN to advise on addressing the potential impacts of the project on turtles. IUCN carried out a scoping mission in November – December 2006 that led to our current engagement involving mobilization of IUCN scientific expertise to provide the requisite advice. All along, IUCN has been guided by the advice of the scientists in the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) of the Species Survival Commission. The scientists have visited Dhamra on two different technical missions – a dredging mission in December 2007 and a lighting mission in March 2008. The reports of both these missions can be viewed on the IUCN Asia Regional Office website at: <http://cms.iucn.org/about/union/secretariat/offices/asia/index.cfm>.

At the time of IUCN's first involvement, the decision to develop the port had already been taken and work was already underway. IUCN was assigned the role to influence the course of the development. Over the past two years of our engagement, and as a result of it, DPCL has worked towards carrying out turtle-sensitive dredging including putting in place turtle deflectors, fitting screens in inflow pipes, and developing an observer programme. The engineers and DPCL's contractors are currently designing turtle-sensitive lighting systems. In pursuance of a holistic solution for turtle

conservation in Orissa, IUCN is liaising with the Government of Orissa to propose a lighting ordinance which would address lighting at a greater geographical scale than in Dhamra alone. The IUCN team is also designing programmes to generate awareness amongst local communities, especially children, about the turtles and the need to conserve them; and is working with fishermen to encourage them to use turtle excluder devices (TED) to reduce the incidence of bycatch.

IUCN's decision to get involved in the Dhamra port project was guided by its Mission to influence, encourage and assist societies for the conservation and sustainable use of nature. In engaging with business, IUCN seeks to conserve fragile and unique ecosystems and mitigate the negative environmental impacts of developments. In the DPCL case, IUCN has been fulfilling and continues to fulfil its Mission and role by providing assistance with mitigation of the impact of port development activities, such as dredging and lighting, on marine turtles. In addition to this, IUCN is encouraging DPCL to develop a comprehensive environmental management plan that would address the broader issues of environment. More details on IUCN's support to DPCL are available at: <http://cms.iucn.org/about/union/secretariat/offices/asia/index.cfm>.

It is important to remember that IUCN is not a regulatory organization and does not have a mandate to adjudicate in cases such as this: rather, it provides independent scientific advice when called on to do so. Any such involvement is neither intended nor should be construed as approving or disapproving a particular development but rather as a means to help those making decisions with respect to the conservation of nature. IUCN hopes that its work with DPCL will generate useful tools and examples around mainstreaming biodiversity conservation in major economic development projects, and that lessons from the Dhamra port experiences will benefit the planning and development of other ports in the country, notably in terms of the importance of comprehensive planning, early stakeholders' engagement, and timely access to scientific advice.

Gland 04 June, 2008