



8TH MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO IOSEA MARINE TURTLE MOU AGREES ON NEW ACTIONS TO PROTECT TURTLES

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The 8th Meeting of the Signatories (MOS8) to the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU was held from 21 to 24th October 2019 in Da Nang, hosted by the Government of Viet Nam. Representatives of 25 Signatory States and two non-Signatory Range States, as well as several Advisory Committee Members and many observers, attended the meeting. The Advisory Committee met just before MOS8, from 16 to 18th October, with the days in between used to finalise its advice regarding priorities and the future direction of the MOU.

The main output of MOD8 is a Work Programme (available at www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en/meeting/MOS8) for the years 2020-2024, which prioritises recommended activities for the Signatory States, the Advisory Committee, and the Secretariat. It was developed based on a review of all recommendations of past Meetings of Signatories and other intersessional meetings, as well as recommendations made at MOS8.

Twenty-six Signatory States submitted national reports before the meeting, providing information on the state of implementation of the MOU in their countries, as well as problems faced by marine turtles in their territories. Countries also had an opportunity to indicate where they saw priorities and capacity-building needs both nationally and in their sub-region. MOS8 also set up a working group, which will review the national reporting format to ensure it is up to date and fulfils its function.

The meeting also discussed guidelines for the review of environmental impact assessments (EIAs) of developments with an impact on marine turtles and turtle habitat. It was recognised that a balance had to be struck between economic development and nature conservation. Oil and gas installations, harbour facilities, urban development and golf courses all have potential effects on natural habitats. EIA processes follow a basic pattern in all countries, but any flaws in the process can render them ineffective. The presence of endangered species should be an automatic trigger for EIA, but the complex life cycle of marine turtles makes it difficult to assess the effects of a project on the

taxa. The document presented to the meeting includes a table setting out safe distances and suitable buffer zones. Specifically relating to marine noise, guidelines adopted by CMS were also made available to Signatories.

Other topics on the agenda included: illegal take and trade of marine turtles, under which both the relevant outcomes of a study conducted by CITES and a study investigating this issue in the Solomon Islands were discussed; opportunities for collaboration with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and other international organisations, such as CITES, Ramsar and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs); and guidance on beach management and hatcheries.

Amongst the highlights of the meeting was the inclusion of Con Dao National Park, Viet Nam, into the IOSEA Network of Sites of Importance for Marine Turtles in the Indian Ocean. The IOSEA Site Network aims to promote and coordinate the long-term conservation of sites of regional and global importance to marine turtles and their habitats. When the Network was launched in 2014, 10 sites were evaluated according to a set of defined criteria and accepted. Con Dao National Park has become the 11th Site in the Network (information on all sites can be found at www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en/activities/site-network).

Con Dao National Park is situated off the south-east coast of Viet Nam and consists of 14 islands. The smaller islands surrounding Con Son Island especially offer important nesting beaches. The waters of Con Dao provide feeding habitats for green (*Chelonia mydas*) and hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) turtles, both of which are included on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Viet Nam introduced legal protection of marine turtles in 1987, when consumption of meat and eggs became illegal. The first two marine turtle conservation stations in Con Dao were established in 1989, and a further three stations in 1996. Thanks to the conservation efforts of the Vietnamese Government, there has been a dramatic decline in poaching of marine turtles and egg collection. Con Dao was established as a National Park in 1993. However,

activities in the areas surrounding the site are causing increasing pressures to the habitats. These pressures include: illegal take of marine turtles and collection of their eggs for trade; marine pollution from untreated waste; and overfishing and destructive fishing practices, which disturb the foraging and nesting of marine turtles. To enhance the protection of the marine turtle habitats, the IOSEA Site Network aims to address these threats. Further information about the IOSEA MOU can

be found online (www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en/). Pictures from the meeting can be found in the related news item on the IOSEA website (<https://www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en/news/signatories-iosea-marine-turtle-mou-agree-new-work-programme-0>).

For any questions regarding the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU, please contact the Coordinator, Ms Heidrun Frisch-Nwakanma. The official email address, iosea@un.org, is also again operational.

IMPORTANT TERMS EXPLAINED

IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU: The Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia is a framework through which States, territories, inter- and non-governmental stakeholders of the region, as well as other concerned States, can work together to conserve marine turtle populations and their habitats. The objective of the MOU is to protect, conserve, replenish and recover marine turtles and their habitats, based on the best scientific evidence, taking into account the environmental, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the Signatory States. It came into effect in 2001. A Conservation and Management Plan is part of the MOU. (more information at www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en)

Signatory States: Thirty-five countries have so far signed the MOU (see list at www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en/about/membership)

non-Signatory Range States: Countries in the region (or active in the region) that have not yet signed the MOU, but are invited to do so.

Advisory Committee (AC): In order to help them achieve the MOU's objective, Signatories established an AC, which provides scientific, technical and legal advice to the Signatories, individually and collectively. The AC currently consists of ten members representing a range of relevant expertise (for details, see www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en/organizational-structure/advisory-committee).

Secretariat: Based in Bonn, Germany, it acts as the coordinating body of the MOU and was established to assist communication, encourage reporting and facilitate activities between and among Signatory States, sub-regional institutions and other interested States and organizations (see also www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en/organizational-structure/secretariat-iosea).

Meeting of Signatory States (MOS): It is the decision-making body of the MOU. The MOS meets regularly subject to capacity, need and availability of funding, to review progress made and difficulties encountered in the implementation of the MOU and to lay down the priorities for the next years. Meetings of the MOS are open to observers, such as researchers and NGO representatives (for more information on meetings held so far, go to www.cms.int/iosea-turtles/en/about/iosea-organisational-structure).