



REGIONAL SEAS

STATUS OF SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN

*Proceedings of the Western Indian Ocean Training
Workshop and Strategic Planning Session on Sea Turtles,
held at Sodwana Bay, South Africa,
November 12-18, 1995*

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PREFACE

In contrast to their importance to mankind, the marine component of biological diversity requires considerably more attention to improve our current state of knowledge. Information on the status of marine living resources and ecosystems remain much less readily available than in terrestrial ecosystems.

This document is a compilation of information from the region needed as a basis for sound conservation and management of sea turtles in the western Indian Ocean.

The overall coordination of UNEP's role for the management and conservation of marine biodiversity is the responsibility of the Water Branch (which comprises the former Oceans and Coastal Areas Programme Activity Centre - OCA/PAC and Freshwater Unit). The Water Branch is action oriented and focussed not only on mitigation but also on the causes of environmental degradation. It was created as a global programme that is implemented through regional components as represented by the Regional Seas Programmes. The focus of the Water Branch comprises both inter-regional and regional activities on management of coastal, marine and freshwater resources and ecosystems. These include activities which will specifically promote implementation of the Regional Seas Protocols on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA/W) and are an integral part of UNEP's contribution to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted in June 1992.

The support provided to convene this workshop contributes to the implementation of the Protocol Concerning Protected Areas and Wild Fauna and Flora in the Eastern African Region, adopted by the parties to the Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region, Nairobi, 21 June 1985. The five species of Sea Turtles found in the western Indian Ocean are listed in Annex IV of the Protocol on "Protected Migratory Species".

UNEP is pleased to have been associated with this initiative for the conservation and management of living resources of the western Indian Ocean. It is hoped that increased cooperation will arise among the scientific community along with Governments who are engaged in efforts to conserve sea turtles in the region.

Note: This document was edited by IUCN- The World Conservation Union, Eastern Africa region office based on the contributions of the participants to the western Indian Ocean training Workshop and Strategic Planning Session on Sea Turtles, held at Sodwana Bay, South Africa (12-18 November 1995). This workshop was sponsored by: Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF International), Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Natal Parks Board, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-Water Branch), Netherlands Assistance to Department of Environment Zanzibar, Royal Netherlands Embassy Nairobi, FINNIDA and WWF South Africa. The financial support for reproduction of this document was provided by UNEP and technical support by Ms. Monica Borobia, Programme Officer, UNEP-Water Branch.

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FOREWORD

There are many compelling reasons for holding a regional meeting on the management and conservation of sea turtle, chief among them being the far ranging nature of turtles which swim many hundreds, even thousands of kilometres between their nesting and feeding sites, crossing through the waters of several different national jurisdictions in the process. Turtles are a shared resource, and their survival requires the collaboration of all states in the region that share them. There are more pragmatic reasons too, such as the opportunity to address the training needs of many different institutions and states at one time, and the changing strategy of many donor agencies away from bilateral to regional programmes.

IUCN - The World Conservation Union was requested through its Eastern Africa Regional Office to develop a regional marine turtle conservation initiative as part of a broader western Indian Ocean marine biodiversity conservation programme. This fits well with the priority actions identified in *A Global Strategy for the Conservation of Marine Turtles* recently developed and published by the IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group. The Strategy specifically calls for "... management through regional and international cooperation and coordination."

Dr George Hughes, Chief Executive of the Natal Parks Board, kindly agreed to host the workshop at Sodwana Bay, site of one of the world's longest running and most successful turtle research and management programmes, and a location well suited for practical training in turtle and nesting beach research, monitoring and management techniques. This provided the necessary impetus for IUCN, through its Eastern Africa Regional Office and Marine Turtle Specialist Group Programme, to proceed with the organisation and implementation of the workshop.

This workshop represented the first effort to develop a regional turtle conservation strategy under the global IUCN strategy. The principal objectives of the workshop were to:

- initiate networking among marine turtle researchers and managers;
- formulate a regional conservation strategy for turtles; and,
- train senior researchers and managers.

The workshop brought together researchers and managers from South Africa, Mozambique, Comoros, Mauritius, La Réunion, Mayotte, Seychelles, Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar, Kenya and Eritrea, as well as international experts. We had as our trainers Dr George Hughes of South Africa, Dr Colin Limpus of Australia and Dr Jeanne Mortimer of the USA, all of whom are widely recognised as world leaders in their field. We were privileged to have this team leading the training programme, and to have had the opportunity of conducting the workshop at the Sodwana location.

We are most grateful to all participants for their interest and enthusiasm for this workshop and the excellent calibre of their national reports that follow in this volume, and to all of our sponsors for enabling implementation of the workshop. In particular, we would like to thank our hosts, the Natal Parks Board, and the major sponsors, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and WWF International.

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PART 1

BACKGROUND

WELCOMING SPEECH

INKOSI N.J. NGUBANE

MINISTER OF TRADITIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Dr. Rodney Salm, Dr. Colin Limpus, Dr George Hughes, Ladies and gentlemen.

It is my great privilege and pleasure, as Minister of Traditional and Environmental Affairs in KwaZulu-Natal, to welcome you all to this Sea Turtle Workshop at Sodwana Bay today.

I know most of you - besides our South African Delegates - have come from many far places both on and off this great continent of Africa of ours to be here this week. From Kenya and Tanzania, from Madagascar and Zanzibar, from Réunion and the Seychelles, from the Comoros, from Eritrea and several other places. Indeed, from as far even as the United States of America.

Over the past 30 years, the St Lucia Marine Reserve along the Maputaland Coastline has been used increasingly by these great creatures of the ocean as their preferred nesting grounds. In order to do so, they themselves travel great distances along the African Coast to benefit from the protection they find in this region.

This fact may be seen (Both symbolically and, indeed, in reality) as representing a link between our many nations, as we work together to conserve the natural resources not only of Africa, but of our planet as a whole. We do this, of course, not only for the benefit of all mankind, but also to ensure the continued existence of our fellow creatures on earth.

We all know that man cannot live in isolation, that we can no longer afford to plunder the Earth's resources, that we dare not allow the continued rape of our oceans, that the whole of the life-chain of nature must be allowed to survive if we ourselves are to survive.

So it is with this in mind, ladies and gentlemen, that I would now like to express on behalf of us all, very great appreciation of the work carried out by the IUCN - the World

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