

TECHNICAL CONSULTATION ON SEA TURTLES CONSERVATION AND FISHERIES
Bangkok, Thailand, 29 November – 2 December 2004

Statement of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)

We welcome the Technical Consultation on Sea Turtles Conservation and Fisheries and consider it timely. Turtles are seen as indicators of the health of diverse marine ecosystems, and the depletion of turtle populations, both as a result of fisheries and non-fisheries related factors, is reflective of the degradation of the larger marine ecosystem.

Traditional fishing communities have co-existed for centuries in harmony with populations of turtles and other marine resources. Fishing communities can be considered natural allies in turtle conservation programmes. It is a matter of great concern, however, that conservation programmes to protect turtles have, in some cases, jeopardized livelihoods of small-scale and traditional fishworkers.

It has been proven beyond doubt that meaningful and empowered participation of primary stakeholders, with a clear delineation of their rights and responsibilities, has led to successful management of natural resources and to betterment of local livelihoods. It is imperative that turtle conservation programmes be carried out in participatory ways, in consultation with traditional fishing communities.

We, therefore, urge States to ensure that turtle conservation programmes take into account the following:

- Traditional fishworkers should be made equal and effective partners in conservation efforts at all levels. Traditional fishers have a wealth of knowledge about their ecosystems. Their understanding of turtle-fisheries interactions is often detailed and experiential. They are, therefore, in the best position to identify and implement suitable conservation measures.
- Conservation programmes should be based on sound and participatory research that leads to a greater *in situ* understanding of turtle-fisheries interactions in various contexts; for example, a better understanding of how different kinds of gear interact with marine turtles in different fisheries. Educating fishers about simple ways of preventing or reducing mortality of turtles accidentally caught in their nets, and exploring dynamic conservation measures, such as protection of “reproductive patches” of turtles, may well be more effective in certain contexts than other measures currently being used for turtle conservation.
- States should recognize that the interests of turtle conservation and management can be effectively served by implementation and enforcement of fisheries and environmental legislation already in place, but poorly implemented. Legislation in many countries, for example, prohibits trawling and large-scale fishing in inshore waters, reserving these waters for the non-trawl small-scale sector. Better implementation of such legislation has been a long-standing demand of small-scale fishworkers in several countries.
- Conservation programmes should, to the extent possible, avoid drastic measures, such as a complete ban on all small-scale and traditional fishing operations, lengthy closed seasons, etc., that have severe implications for livelihoods of artisanal and small-scale

fishworkers. At the same time, no traditional fishing gear should be banned without adequate and scientific study and data. Small-scale fishers displaced due to a ban on any particular gear should be provided with adequate financial assistance for shifting to any other allowable gear. All affected small-scale fishers should be compensated if a seasonal ban is implemented, for the loss of income during the duration of the ban. Training and other financial assistance for alternative livelihood programmes for small-scale fishworkers displaced from the fishery as a result of conservation measures should be considered.

- Conservation measures, such as declaration of marine reserves with ‘no fishing zones’, where implemented, should clearly define and protect the rights to safe passage of fishing vessels through such zones. This is an important issue for several communities living in the proximity of marine sanctuaries, who have to cross the core area of the sanctuary to fish beyond, and face harassment from enforcement officials on a regular basis.
- There should be greater dissemination of information about conservation measures and regulations in place, particularly among fishworkers. This, in combination with professional training of enforcement officers responsible for apprehending fishing vessels, should ensure that unnecessary harassment of fishers and increasing opportunities for bureaucratic corruption, are avoided.
- Turtle conservation programmes should respect the rights of fishing communities to access and sustainably use fisheries and marine resources, as recognized under various national and international legal instruments, including the Convention in Biological Diversity, the Convention on Migratory Species, and the Code of Conduct of Responsible Fisheries.
- Conservation programme should contribute in direct ways to poverty alleviation, and socio-economic conditions of local communities should improve as a result of conservation measures. This would also be in line with the Millennium Development Goals and the Basic Principles outlined in Annex I on the Elaborated Programme of Work On Marine and Coastal Biological Diversity, under Decision VII/5 (COP7 of the CBD, Kuala Lumpur, 2004). Towards this, socio-economic data of communities living adjacent to turtle conservation areas should be comprehensively collected and monitored, to gauge impact of conservation programmes.
- Conservation programmes should address the range of factors that contribute to turtle mortality, including non-fishery factors such as industrial and urban pollution of the sea, development projects such as ports, military establishments and operations, oil and gas exploration, rare earth mining from the coastal areas, intensive prawn culture, collection of prawn seeds by fine-meshed nets, and uncontrolled and irresponsible tourism, and bring them within the ambit of conservation programmes. Conservation programmes should take a holistic, ecosystem approach towards conservation, management and sustainable use of all the coastal and marine living resources, including turtles.

The integration of the above considerations into conservation programmes would be effective in meeting both the objective of turtle conservation and the livelihood interests of traditional fishing communities, ensuring that communities become powerful allies in conservation programmes.