

# INTER-AMERICAN CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF SEA TURTLES (IAC)

## NEWS BULLETIN

AUGUST - DECEMBER 2025

N°56

Foto: Didiher Chacón/LAST  
Ostional, Costa Rica-Arribada *Lepidochelys*  
*olivacea*



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## IAC Secretary attended the Trinidad and Tobago national stakeholder for the Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan.

October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025

The IAC Secretary MSc. Verónica Cáceres, attended the Trinidad and Tobago national stakeholder meeting to refine the draft revised Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan (STRAP) for Trinidad and Tobago. The meeting held by videoconference was organized by the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) on October 16th. The meeting provided an overview of the Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan for Trinidad and Tobago and discussed management provisions related to the reduction of sea turtle bycatch. The participants shared thoughts and experiences as it relates to fishing interactions with sea turtles in Trinidad and Tobago, and the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) provided an update about their ongoing process to accede to the Inter-American Sea Turtle Convention.

More information here: <https://www.ema.co.tt/>

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## IAC presentation at the “30x30 in Action” Conference – Network of Marine and Coastal Areas of the Southeast Pacific.

October 16 y 17, 2025

Within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) and the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS), the IAC Secretary Ms. Verónica Cáceres gave a presentation on the importance of Marine Protected Areas for sea turtles and the opportunities for IAC- CPPS collaboration at the International Conference “30×30 in Action: Integrated Management of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas in the Southeast Pacific (RAMPAS),” held from October 16 to 17 in the city of Viña del Mar, Chile.

The event, under the theme “United Efforts, Shared Responsibilities,” was organized by the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS) and aimed to promote regional cooperation and strengthen marine conservation policies within the framework of the global 30×30 target, which seeks to protect at least 30% of marine and coastal ecosystems by the year 2030.



The Network of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas of the Southeast Pacific (RAMPAS) is an intergovernmental collaboration mechanism among countries in the region, aimed at conserving marine-coastal biodiversity and ecosystems, ensuring their long-term health and functionality. Through this network, CPPS member states seek to implement coordinated measures for ocean protection and the sustainable use of its resources, linking more than 120 protected areas and multiple programs at various levels of government.

RAMPAS promotes capacity building, connection among marine area managers, and the exchange of experiences, best practices, and technical, scientific, and community knowledge. Its mission is to contribute to more effective management of marine and coastal protected areas in the Southeast Pacific through an active and robust network that also raises public awareness about the value of the ocean and its ecosystems. RAMPAS is primarily composed of CPPS member states: Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Peru, with Costa Rica participating as an allied country. The network is supported by the Save the Blue Five Cooperation Project.

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## **IAC Secretary attended the virtual workshop on Biology & Ecosystem Essential Ocean Variables (BioEco EOVs) for sea turtles.**

**November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Biology & Ecosystem Essential Ocean Variables (BioEco EOVs) were identified by the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) to meet needs for understanding and forecasting marine life. They provide a framework for coordinating ocean observations, ensuring globally comparable and combinable data. Standardizing data for EOVs is a global effort involving many dedicated organizations. To learn more about EOVs, visit the GOOS website: [www.goosoceano.org](http://www.goosoceano.org).

The workshop objective was to share the rationale, thoughts, and opportunities for this initiative with other ongoing ones, and how Goos views the global initiatives receiving feedback from and strengthening each other for having a "data ecosystem" for the sea turtle community. Find out how GOOS can promote advances in network collaboration using global standardized frameworks (in the case that they are not in place yet) for promoting different data sources.

The IAC Secretary provided the workshop organizers with information on the type of data for monitoring sea turtle nesting on IAC index beaches that IAC request from the member countries in the IAC Annual Report, with the aim that this indicator can be considered for use by GOOS to develop the BioEco EOVs for sea turtles.



# 22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the IAC Scientific Committee (SC22)

November 12 y 13, 2025

The IAC-SC22 was chaired by Chile's delegate to the IAC Scientific Committee, Ms. Lezlie Camila Bustos, and the Committee's Vice Chair, Dr. Heriberto Santana. The meeting included participation from the delegations from the 16 IAC Parties, with 42 participants, including observers from the governments of Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, and Suriname. The SC22 was convened by videoconference. SC22 adopted its 2026–2028 work plan and the technical documents "Electronic Monitoring Systems in Fisheries for the Conservation of Sea Turtles" and "Fibropapillomatosis in Sea Turtles within the IAC Region." A Working Group on *Chelonia mydas* was established, and technical recommendations were provided to the government of Honduras to support the identification of the peak nesting season of *Lepidochelys olivacea* in the country.

During the meeting, scientific research from Guatemala was presented with the topic "*Temperature-Dependent Sex Determination: Sea Turtle Nesting in Guatemala*," and research from Honduras was presented with the topic of "*Marine Connectivity, Habitat Use, and the Silent Urgency of Transboundary Conservation*."

The SC22 elected Ms. Lezlie Camila Bustos to continue as Chair of the IAC Scientific Committee for the 2026–2027 term, and elected MSc. Didiher Chacón as Vicechair.



Group Photo 22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the IAC Scientific Committee



Vicechair Scientific Committee - Didiher Chacón

Chair Scientific Committee- Lezlie Bustos





## Meeting of the IAC Working Group on Vessel Strikes with Sea Turtles. November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025

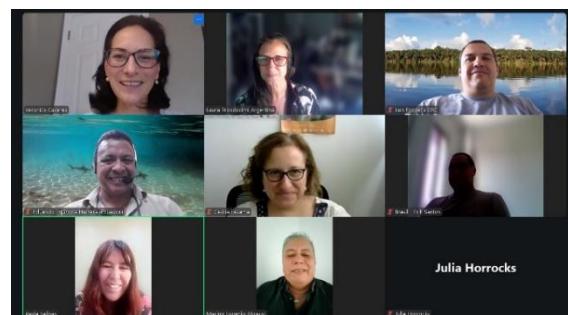
The Coordinator of the Working Group, Mr. Ricardo Rodríguez, delegate of the Dominican Republic to the IAC Scientific Committee, presented the progress on the preparation of the technical document “*Guidelines for the Mitigation of Vessel Strikes with Sea Turtles*”, which was presented at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Scientific Committee. The working group discussed the comments from SC22, prepared a strategy to include them into the final version of the technical document. The final document is expected to be completed by February 2026 for review via electronic correspondence by the Scientific and Consultative Committees.



IAC Scientific Committee Working Group  
on Vessel Strikes with Sea Turtles

## Meeting of the Green Turtle IAC Working Group. December 8th, 2025

On December 8, 2025, the first meeting of the IAC Green Turtle Working Group was held, with the participation of representatives from Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, the Netherlands, Panama, Brazil, Uruguay, and Costa Rica. During the meeting, the recent global reclassification of *Chelonia mydas* by the IUCN was discussed, and it was agreed to prepare an Information document for IAC COP12 describing the status of the species as presented in the latest IUCN assessment. Subsequently, the group will develop a Technical Document incorporating additional regional information not included in that assessment. The coordination of the Working Group by Eduardo Espinoza, member of the IAC Scientific Committee of Ecuador was decided, along with the Working Group's work plan.





# IAC participates in the 1<sup>st</sup> Workshop for the advancement of the guidelines of the IATTC Research Program on Sharks, Sea Turtles and Seabirds – Videoconference

December 15th, 2025

The members of the IAC Fisheries Working Group Dr. Laura Prodoscimi, Dr. Heriberto Santana and Licda. Karina Ramírez attended the 1st Workshop for the Advancement of Guidelines for the Research Program on Sharks, Sea Turtles, and Seabirds of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), held on December 15, 2025.

The objective of the workshop was to provide participants—IATTC Contracting Parties, scientists from IATTC, and subject matter experts—with the opportunity to further review and provide feedback, as appropriate, on the content and recommendations for best handling and release practices (BHR) developed by IATTC scientific staff as part of their 2024 work plan. These recommendations are contained in documents SAC-16-10 (sharks), EB-03-05 (sea turtles), and EB-03-06 (seabirds), with the aim of moving toward the possible adoption of meaningful BHR guidelines for these taxa in 2026. The IAC participation strengthens the implementation of the IAC – IATTC Memorandum of Understanding.

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## Guardians of the Nest: Sea Turtle Monitoring in Masargandub, Guna Yala, Panama

News Text: Mar Alliance

The Guna Yala archipelago, made up of more than 365 islands and islets, is one of the best preserved marine ecosystems in Panama. Among its crystalline waters and vibrant coral reefs is Masargandub, a small island of just 34 hectares. Its coastline, about two kilometers long, is surrounded by healthy reefs that harbor rich marine biodiversity.

On this Caribbean island, located within the autonomous territory of the Guna people, a transformative conservation effort has flourished. Since 2021, local community members, environmental organizations, and committed volunteers have come together with a common goal: to protect the critically endangered hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) while preserving the region's ecological and cultural heritage.

This conservation project, led by MarAlliance in collaboration with the community group Iguadalinega, has grown significantly over time. Today, it includes nightly beach patrols, nest monitoring, hatchling release, environmental education in schools, coastal cleanup, and workshops with island families. Although hawksbill





turtles are currently the most common nesting species on Masargandub, historical records and accounts from Guna elders indicate that green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) also used to arrive on these beaches in the past.

The team follows rigorous, internationally recognized sea turtle monitoring protocols, but has also incorporated innovative elements. Soon, temperature sensors (HOBOs) will be introduced in the nests, which will make it possible to estimate the sex ratio of hatchlings - a fundamental variable for understanding the effects of climate change on these species. In addition, satellite transmitters are planned to tag nesting females to learn about their migratory routes and marine habitats beyond the nesting season.

However, beyond the science, the heart of the project beats with stories like that of Aquilino Alfaro, a young man from Masargandub. Raised in a tradition where hunting and eating turtles were part of everyday life, Aquilino changed his perspective after joining the monitoring team. Understanding the crucial role these species play in the health of the ocean, he became a passionate advocate for their conservation. Today, he teaches his children to protect, not hunt, and to honor marine life as an essential part of their cultural identity.

The purpose of the project goes beyond biological research. It seeks to strengthen local capacities, highlight Guna communities with their role as ancestral guardians of the sea, and foster a sense of belonging towards natural resources. In this way, science and traditional knowledge walk hand in hand, building a conservation model based on mutual respect and shared knowledge.



Foto:Mar Alliance Rachel Graham



# Workshop for Community Strengthening and Conservation of Sea Turtles - Ngabe Bugle Comarca, Panama

News Text: Marino Agrego - Ministerio de Ambiente Panamá - Delegate of the Scientific Committee of the IAC

On October 28th, in the Río Caña Abajo community of the Kusapín district, a workshop was held for Community Strengthening and Conservation of Sea Turtles in the Kusapín District, Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca. The objective of this activity was to strengthen cooperation between state institutions, environmental organizations, local communities, and NGOs to prevent the hunting and looting of sea turtle nests through environmental education, dissemination of current regulations, and dialogue with the community. Representatives from the Ministry of Environment (MIAMBIENTE) spoke about the Protection, Conservation, and Sustainable Management of Sea Turtles in Panama; the Public Prosecutor's Office presented the regulations and criminal liability in the protection of sea turtles; and the Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) presented its conservation efforts in the Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca and Panama. Additionally, the National Aeronaval Service (SRNAN), the Justice of the Peace, the Mayor of the Kusapín District, and the Corregimiento Representative participated, addressing various topics related to the protection and conservation of sea turtles. The activity was organized by the Sea Turtle Conservancy, led by biologist Felipe Baker. The Ministry of the Environment (MiAMBIENTE) was represented by biologist Marino Abrego, National Deputy Director of Coasts and Seas, while the Environmental Prosecutor's Office was represented by attorney José Jurado, and the Río Cañas Ugüenien Project also participated.





# Strengthening Actions for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles and other Coastal and Marine Resources

News Text: Marino Agrego - Ministerio de Ambiente Panamá - Delegate of the Scientific Committee of the IAC

From December 3rd to 6th of this year, the Directorate of Coasts and Seas of the Ministry of Environment of Panama conducted a site visit to the Costa Arriba region of Colón, in the district of Santa Isabel, to follow up on the project to create the Santa Isabel Special Coastal Marine Management Zone. Some of the results achieved were:



1. Participation, representing the Ministry of Environment, in the third meeting of the Santa Isabel Territorial Planning Plan.
2. Meeting between the Ministry of Environment and the Biologist. Marino Abrego, Deputy Director of Coasts and Seas, and his technical team met with the Mayor of Santa Isabel, Amed Meza, along with members of his team and councilors from the Santa Isabel District to present information from DICOMAR-MiAMBIENTE on the importance and scope of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). They discussed key aspects of the project to create the Santa Isabel Special Marine Coastal Management Zone, explaining the procedures for its creation, objectives, criteria, polygon data, and phases of the process. Environmental and conservation issues were also addressed, including sea turtles, corals, mangroves, sand extraction, the presence of jaguars in the area, the queen conch (including the Cambute fishing ban), the management of sea turtle nesting beaches, regulations concerning coastal and marine resources, orderly and sustainable coastal development, sargassum invasion, and the presence and management of lionfish. Questions from the mayor and councilors were answered, and finally, the meeting concluded. They discussed

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the planning and organization of the First Blue Fair in the Santa Isabel District, to be held in May 2026.

3. The delivery of materials and supplies to the 8 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in the Santa Isabel district began, provided by DICOMAR-MiAMBIENTE to support their activities. These organizations are involved and committed to the protection and conservation of coastal and marine resources, primarily sea turtles and their habitats.



## Costa Rica updates its Manual for the Management of Beaches and Sea Turtle Hatcheries

News Text: Didiher Chacon – LAST - Delegate of the Scientific Committee of the IAC Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC), with support from the MarViva Foundation and cooperation from the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), is making progress in updating the Manual for the Management of Beaches and Sea Turtle Nesting Areas, originally published in 2007. The project began in October 2024 with a situational survey of conservation areas, the results of which served as the basis for a workshop held in November 2024, where the content and guidelines of the new manual were discussed. After five rounds of review, a final draft was completed, incorporating conceptual, methodological, and design updates.

During 2025, validation and training workshops were conducted in the North and Central Pacific regions to strengthen management practices in the field. The process, funded by the Save the Blue Five project, will continue in 2026 with five additional workshops in different regions of the Pacific. This initiative represents a fundamental step toward strengthening the conservation of sea turtles and the sustainable management of their nesting beaches in the tropical eastern Pacific.





## New Manual on the Handling and Release of Sea Turtles Incidentally Caught in Costa Rica

News Text: Didiher Chacon – LAST - Delegate of the Scientific Committee of the IAC Costa Rica

Within the framework of the SAVE the Blue Five project, funded by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), with the participation of the Costa Rican Fisheries and Aquaculture Institute (INCOPESCA), the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC), and the National Learning Institute (INAI), a new Manual for the Release and Handling of Sea Turtles Incidentally Caught in Fishing Operations in Costa Rica is being developed.

The process is being led by SIRBAA, an organization specializing in fisheries issues in Mexico, and includes the collaboration of experts Heriberto Santana and Didiher Chacon, both affiliated with the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC).

The manual, already approved in its preliminary version, is currently in the final design phase. Its implementation will include a training program for instructors from the National Learning Institute (INA), with the goal of transferring the proposed techniques and protocols to local trainers who will then replicate the training throughout the country.

The training workshop is scheduled for February 2026, marking a key step forward in incorporating good fishing practices for reducing bycatch and conserving sea turtles in Costa Rica.





## Scientific Expedition Tourists Become Ocean Ambassadors in the Golfo Dulce

For the past three years, the organization LAST (Latin American Sea Turtles), in collaboration with its partner Agencia Horizontes, has participated in an environmental education and awareness initiative aimed at visitors on National Geographic and Lindblad Expeditions scientific cruises that travel along Costa Rica's Pacific coast.

Between 50 and 100 people per month visit the project's facilities in the Golfo Dulce, where they receive talks on sea turtle conservation, the region's main environmental problems, and, when possible, participate in the release of rehabilitated turtles after rescue and hook removal procedures.

This experience not only provides firsthand insight into the challenges faced by sea turtles, but has also transformed more than 1,000 participants into ocean ambassadors, strengthening strategic alliances for marine conservation in Costa Rica.

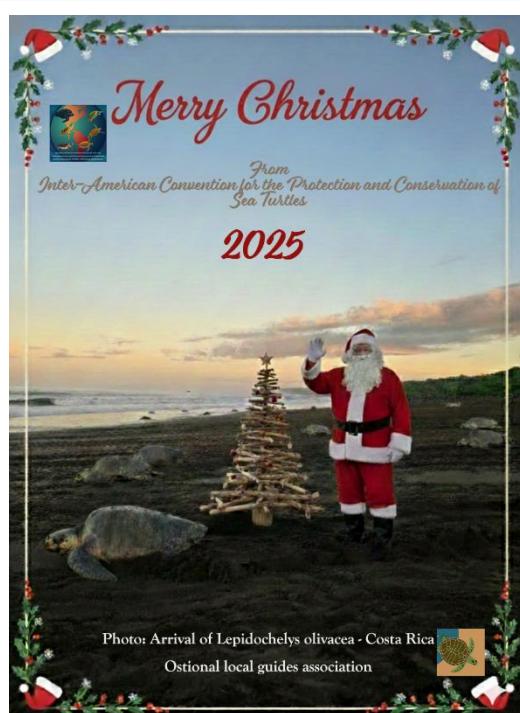


## Happy Holidays 2026!

In this season of reflection and hope, we want to extend our warmest wishes to each of you. May the new year bring health, joy, and new opportunities to grow together.

As we welcome 2026, let us renew our commitment to the planet. Let's protect our oceans—home to invaluable life—and especially sea turtles, ancient inhabitants of the seas. Every action counts: reducing plastic, conserving habitats, and promoting environmental education are steps toward a more sustainable future for our oceans.

Thank you for being part of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles.



With my best wishes,

Verónica Cáceres  
IAC Secretary



## Upcoming IAC Meetings in 2026

19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the IAC Consultative Committee of Experts – March 2026  
12<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the IAC – COP12 – June 2026

You can find the Convention newsletters at this link:

<http://www.iacseaturtle.org/boletin.htm>

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