



NEWS BULLETIN

No.41

October - December 2020

17th Meeting of the IAC Scientific Committee
October 20 - 22, 2020



Some of the 57 participants of the IAC Scientific Committee Meeting

The Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) Scientific Committee held its 17th annual meeting virtually on October 20-22. The meeting was attended by delegates and advisers from the 16 IAC Party Countries (Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Caribbean Netherlands, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela), as well as invited observers from Canada and French Guiana Governments and IAC accredited observers, for record participation of 52 people.

The topics discussed included the recommendations regarding the implementation of the Resolution on Exceptions according to Guatemala and Costa reports presented this year; the periodicity of IAC Technical Documents on index nesting beaches ([CIT-CC15-2018-Tec.14](#)), loggerhead turtle ([CIT-CC13-2016-Tec.13](#)), and the document in preparation regarding interactions between sea turtles and industrial longline fisheries. Similarly, the CC discussed a draft format proposed for recording information on interaction with gillnet fisheries. Other topics included progress in collaboration with other international organizations such as the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, CITES, the SPAW Protocol, Ramsar, and ACAP, with which the IAC has Memorandums of Understanding.

Peru presented the draft of the IAC stranding format and an interesting pilot program to quantify the release of EP leatherbacks from gillnets with the help of fishermen, within the framework of the actions to implement the EP Leatherback Resolution CIT-COP7-2015-R2. Also, the Climate Change presented a progress report and informed that the pilot project to collect environmental data to measure impacts of the global change on sea turtles will formally begin in the first quarter of 2021, with the voluntary participation of Costa Rica, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, and the United States. The SC17 adopted a new technical document on critical areas for the conservation of the Northwest Atlantic leatherback turtle and the outreach document “Northwest Atlantic Leatherback Turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*): A Summary of Current Conservation Status, Challenges and Opportunities” prepared by Canadian NGOs WWF and SeaLife Law.

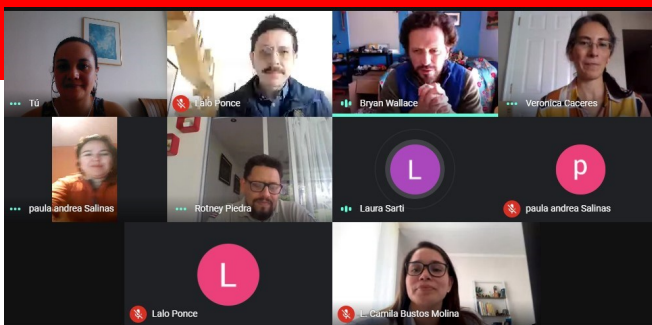
The documents adopted and those in preparation will be presented at the tenth IAC Conference of Parties (COP10) that will take place in June 2021, as part of the recommendations from the Scientific Committee to meet the Convention objective to protect and conserve sea turtles in the region.

IAC Secretary *PT* Presentations in Panama and Venezuela

- IAC Secretary virtual presentation on the IAC and Panama compliance with the Convention’s commitments at the workshop “Information homogenization and Strengthening of Actions for Sea Turtles Conservation and Management for DICOMAR and MiAMBIENTE Technicians and Regional Links” on **October 27, 2020**.
- IAC Secretary *PT*, Ms. Veronica Caceres, virtual presentation on the implementation of the IAC Climate Change Resolution and Working Group progress at the “Eco-social Week Against Climate Change” of Venezuela’s Ministry of Popular Power for Eco-socialism (MINEC) on **October 29, 2020**.



Consultative Committee of Experts Working Groups Preparation meetings for the CCE 14th Meeting 2021: EP Leatherback, Longline artisanal fisheries, and Northwest Atlantic Leatherback.



EP Leatherback Task Force

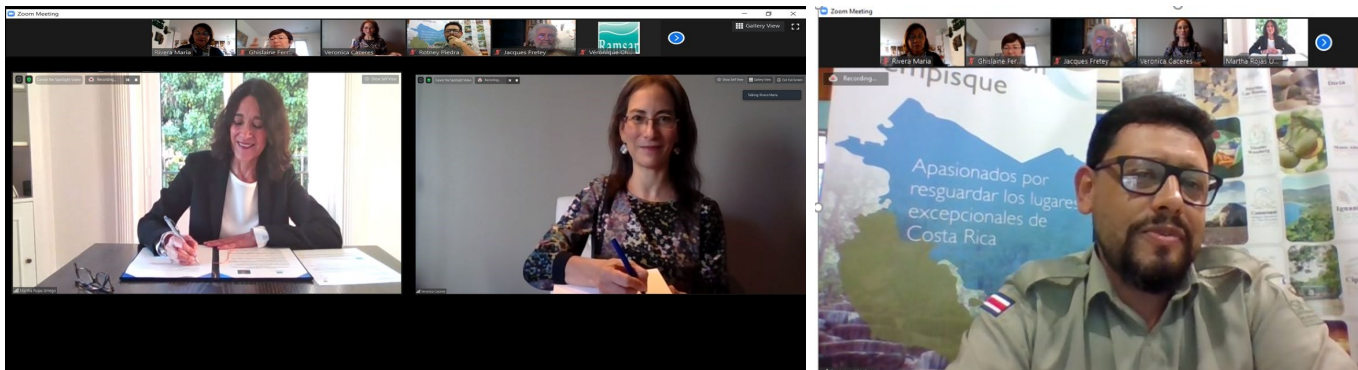


Working Group on Sea Turtle Interactions with Artisanal Longline Fisheries

The Working Groups of the IAC Consultative Committee of Experts have carried out inter-session’s meetings since October 2020, to address the issues regarding the EP leatherback turtle, interactions between sea turtles and artisanal longline fisheries, and the Northwest Atlantic leatherback turtle, in preparation for the CCE 14th Meeting that will take place in March 2021.

The groups met again in November and December 2020 and will resume activities in January 2021 to coordinate the submission of recommendations and products such as the assessment of the implementation of the Resolution for the Conservation of the EP leatherback to the CCE14.

Renewal of Memorandum of Understanding Between the IAC and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance -Ramsar-



Signing of the IAC- Ramsar Memorandum of Understanding renewal between Ramsar Secretary-General, Ms. Martha Rojas Urrego, and the IAC Secretary PT, Ms. Veronica Cáceres (Left). IAC COP Chair – Mr. Rotney Piedra from Costa Rica (Right)

The Secretary-General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Ms. Martha Rojas Urrego, and the Secretary PT of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles, Ms. Veronica Cáceres, signed the renewal of their Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), to continue the collaborative work to protect sea turtle species and the habitats on which they depend, and are crucial for their development and survival, such as wetlands.

At the event attended the IAC COP10 Chair Mr. Rotney Piedra, Ramsar Focal Point from France Ms. Ghislaine Ferrere, Dr. Jacques Fretey, and Ms. Maria Rivera, Ramsar Adviser to the Americas.

The IAC Secretary PT highlighted the results of the document Wetlands of International Importance and Sea Turtle Conservation, that highlight that there are 108 Ramsar sites with the occurrence of sea turtles in the IAC member countries. This encouraged Focal Points from both conventions to get more involved to recommend new areas, important to sea turtles to be considered for Ramsar site designation to increase the level of protection.

Also, the IAC expressed the willingness to embrace the new opportunities for collaboration within the framework of the MoU and Ramsar Resolution XIII.24 “the enhanced conservation of coastal marine turtle habitats and the designation of key areas as Ramsar sites ”.

Participation of Panama, Costa Rica, and the IAC Secretary in Costa Rica’s Embassy in Panama Week of the Environment

On November 27th, the IAC Secretary PT joined the delegates from Panama, Mr. Marino Abrego, and Costa Rica, Mr. Rotney Piedra, to present the activities carried in this country, within the framework of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles. Approximately 20 participants attended the presentation via Microsoft Teams. Before the presentation, the delegates and the Secretariat participated in a meeting with the organizers, a rehearsal meeting, and a meeting to put together the joint presentation.



Delegates from Costa Rica, Mr. Rotney Piedra (Left) and Panama (Right.), Mr. Marino Abrego; Representative of Costa Rica Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ms. Viviana Tinoco (Left.), and the IAC Secretary PT , Ms. Veronica Cáceres.

The Eastern Pacific leatherback turtles return to Guatemala after 20 years

Original note in www.guatemala.com - *Tortugas marinas Baule anidaron en playa de Guatemala después de 20 años* Photo: CONAP's Facebook

Guatemala's National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP) reported on December 16 a finding of 78 Eastern Pacific leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) eggs in Tilapia Beach – San Marcos–, that were relocated in a local hatchery. A first finding was previously reported on November 30, in this same area, by a neighbor that bought a 60 eggs clutch from a *Lepidochelys olivacea* eggs collector, to then donate it to the hatchery.

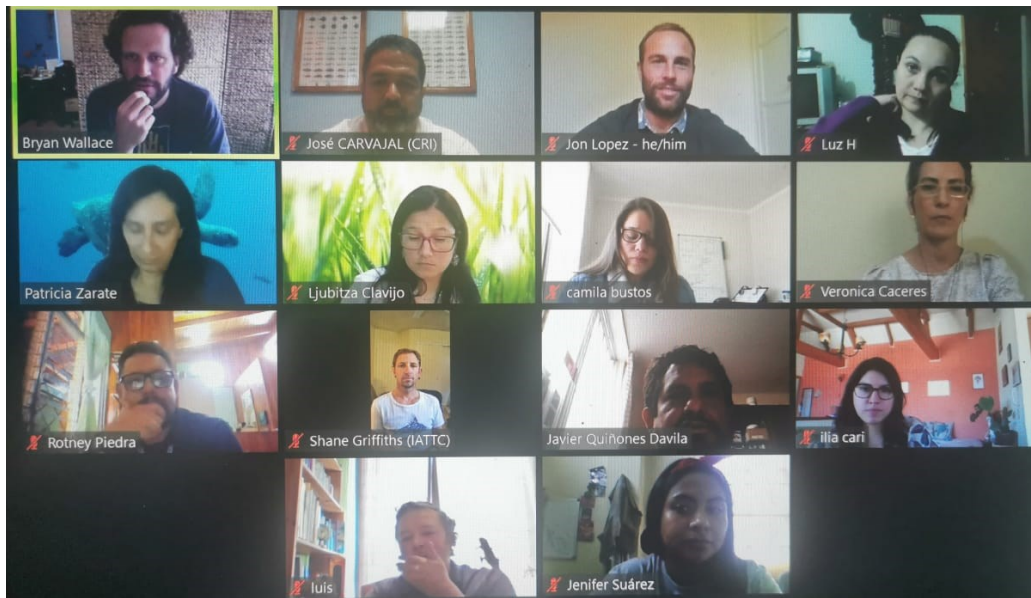
CONAP thanked the actions of the citizens and the Western Highlands Regional Direction to recover the eggs, as this type of report has not been recorded in the last 20 years. It is expected that the eggs hatch within 70 days after the relocation.



First meeting of the IAC-IATTC Working Group

On December 18, 2020, the team working on the collaboration IATTC-IAC to develop the Eastern Pacific leatherback turtle EASI-Fish model met the experts and delegates from the countries within the species range, to explain the information required to enhance the EASI-Fish with a species distribution model.

The IAC delegates from Chile, United States, Ecuador, Peru, and Costa Rica, will submit the relevant information by the end of December to include it in the EASI-Fish model to present it to the IATTC Bycatch Working Group in May 2021.



Tribute in Memory of Dr. Paul Hoetjes



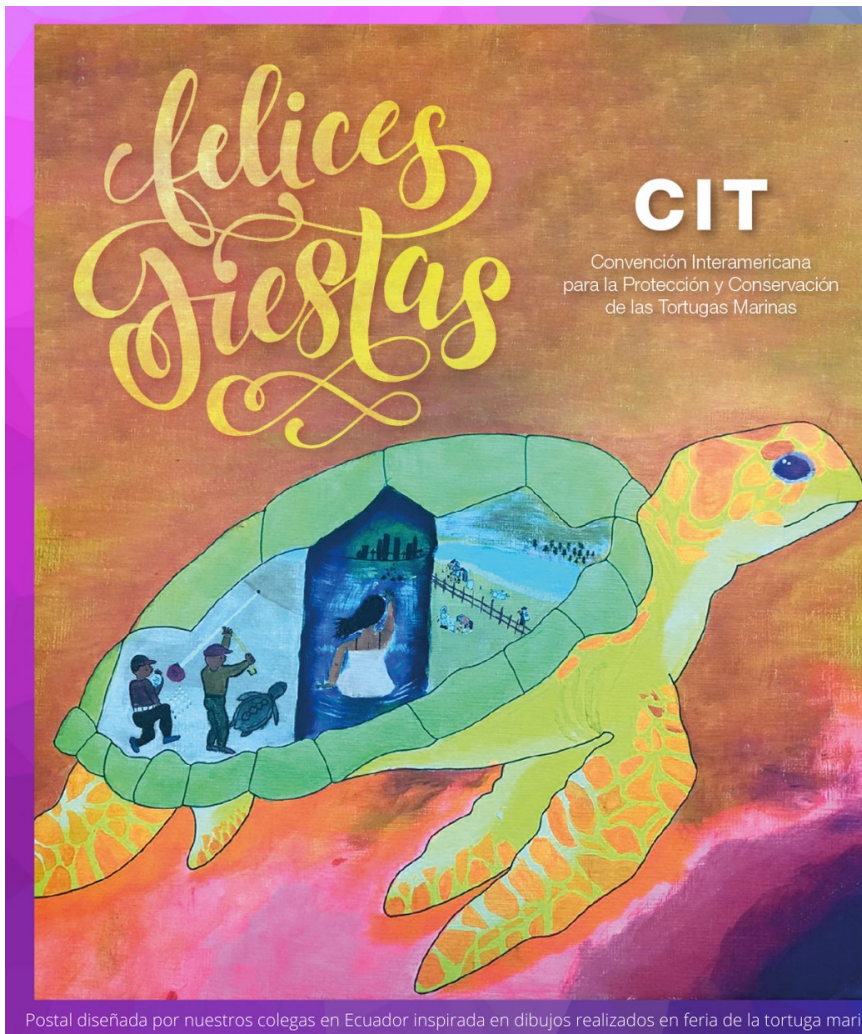
Mourning the early departure of Dr. Paul Hoetjes, the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) pays posthumous tribute to his legacy, leadership, and always accurate advice that greatly contributed to the protection of sea turtles and all marine ecosystems in the Caribbean.

In his own words, the interest of the Caribbean Netherlands to become part of the Convention dedicated to exclusively protecting sea turtles was not much, considering that they were already party to other treaties such as the SPAW protocol. However, he decided to bet on the idea and participated as Focal Point before the Convention for more than 10 years. In 2011, Paul was elected Chair of the Consultative Committee of Experts (CCE), a position for which his colleagues re-elected him until his professional retirement in 2020. In that same year, he hosted the 5th Conference of Parties (COP5) in Bonaire, a place that he always offered to host the IAC Secretariat when needed. As president of the CCE, he supported and advised numerous meetings of the Scientific Committee as well.

His leadership was critical for the development of a work plan to start the sea turtle monitoring program in Curaçao in 2014 and to establish partnerships with the SPAW Protocol and the RAMSAR Convention. In 2019, Paul proposed and succeeded in the adoption of the SPAW Protocol 10th Conference of the Parties Decision 7 to reinforce the joint work between the Cartagena Convention Protocol and the IAC Secretariat, with an emphasis on the conservation of the Northwest Atlantic leatherback turtle.

The tact, commitment, and always timely advice of Dr. Hoetjes to bring the IAC to fruition will be eternally reflected in the achievements that the Convention had during his participation and in our memories. We will miss his presence as a colleague, advisor, and friend.





Estimados Colegas de la CIT,

En esta época especial y a medida que nos acercamos al 2021, la Secretaría *Pro Tempore* de la CIT les expresa nuestra gratitud por su apoyo y dedicación, en la implementación de la Convención en sus países. En un año lleno de desafíos, las tortugas marinas han sido cuidadas y protegidas. Trabajar con todos ustedes, y recibir su apoyo y solidaridad ha sido un honor y un privilegio.

Les deseamos momentos de paz, salud, y amor familiar.

Feliz Navidad y un próspero 2021 gozando de salud.

Dear IAC Colleagues,

Throughout this season and as we move into 2021, the IAC Secretariat *Pro Tempore* wants to thank you for all your dedication and support in the implementation of the IAC in your countries. In a year filled with challenges, sea turtles have continued to be protected and cared for. Working with all of you and has been an honor and privilege.

We wish you a Holiday Season filled with peace, good health, and special times with your family.

Kind regards,

Verónica Cáceres Ch.

IAC Secretary Pro Tempore

TECHNICAL DOCUMENTS

[CIT-CC17-2020-Tec.16](#): Critical Areas for the Conservation of the Northwest Atlantic Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*).

[CIT-CC17-2020-Tec.17](#): Northwest Atlantic Leatherback Turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*): A Summary of Current Conservation Status, Challenges, and Opportunities.

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