



**Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of
Sea Turtles**

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**TECHNICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE IAC SCIENTIFIC
COMMITTEE ON THE EXCEPTIONS ESTABLISHED IN ARTICLE IV (3A AND
B) FOR THE FOR SUBSISTENCE HARVESTING OF *Lepidochelys olivacea* EGGS
IN HONDURAS**

Recommendations in this document have been prepared by the Exceptions Working Group (Exceptions WG) coordinated by Ms. Angela Marcovaldi (Brazil). These recommendations are based on the Exceptions Report presented by the Government of Honduras in their 2016 Annual Report and are submitted to the SC13 consideration.

The IAC Scientific Committee is requested to:

- a) Carefully review the exceptions report presented by the Government of Honduras in its annual report 2016 (Annex I) and the technical recommendations prepared by Exception WG.
- b) Provide recommendations on this Exception to the Consultative Committee of Experts and if appropriate to the country. The CCE will take the recommendations into consideration to prepare, if appropriate, a draft Resolution to be revised by the IAC Conference of Parties in 2017.

Documents to review:

Honduras Annual Report 2016

<http://www.iacseaturtle.org/eng-docs/informes-anuales/2016/2016%20Honduras%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

Procedures for Cases Where Exceptions Exist

http://www.iacseaturtle.org/eng-docs/resolucionesCOP5CIT/CIT-COP5-2011-R2_Exceptions_ENG.pdf

Technical recommendations from the IAC Scientific Committee on the exceptions established in article iv (3a and b) for subsistence harvesting of *Lepidochelys olivacea* eggs in Honduras

It is considered that the information provided by Honduras in its 2016 Annual Report to justify the exception is not clear enough in regards of 1) the total number of nests laid by *Lepidochelys olivacea* females throughout the whole reproductive season in the beaches included in the Exception, 2) the proportion of nests relocated for conservation activities as compared with the total number of nests, and 3) the number of nests allowed for human consumption.

As shown in the *Procedures for Cases Where Exceptions Exist* (CIT-COP5-2011-R2) about the recommendations and the basic elements for countries presenting exceptions: **in the case that a Party presents a request for exception for the extraction and use of sea turtle (*L. olivacea*) eggs, this should include a complete study of the beach or beaches where the exploitation of eggs is intended or in where this activity is taking place.**

Considering that *Lepidochelys olivacea* on the beaches of the Eastern Pacific (Mexico to Panama) is the only species of turtle that can tolerate a carefully controlled amount of egg harvesting, and only when the population to be harvested has demonstrated a status of “recovery or verifiable stability”.

The Scientific Committee Exceptions Working Group recommends to Honduras the following to be taken into account as the first stage to assess the status of *L. olivacea* population:

- Define the index areas for *L. olivacea*
- Report the location and length of this species nesting beach/es.
- Report the total number of *L. olivacea* nests per month throughout the reproductive season.
- Report the number of nests protected (hatchery and beach) and the number of hatchlings released.

From this data, it will be possible to determine the proportion of protected nests in comparison with the total number of nests laid by *L. olivacea*, and therefore justify the number of nests that could be exploited.

ANNEX I

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Exception Report submitted by Honduras

Lepidochelys olivacea eggs consumption in Honduras

Submission of the exception established by the IAC Convention

Description of the exceptions established in Article IV 3(abd) and Annex IV, according to the procedure established by the COP (Doc. CIT-COP5-2011-R2).

Report taken from: Honduras Annual Report to IAC 2016

Date: June 26th, 2016

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Introduction

Five of the seven species of sea turtles have been reported in Honduras up to this date, three in the *Golfo de Fonseca* (Pacific Coast), and four in the Caribbean region.

Distribution Area	Species Scientific and (Common) Name
<i>Golfo de Fonseca</i>	<i>Lepidochelys olivacea</i> (Olive Ridley sea turtle)
	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i> (Hawksbill sea turtle)
	<i>Chelonia mydas</i> (Green sea turtle)
Atlantic Coast/Caribbean	<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i> (Leatherback sea turtle)
	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i> (Hawksbill sea turtle)
	<i>Chelonia mydas</i> (Green sea turtle)
	<i>Caretta caretta</i> (Loggerhead sea turtle)

Background

Since 1975, Honduras began its sea turtle conservation efforts by creating the *Lepidochelys olivacea* Program at Punta Ratón community in the south of the country. Sea turtle conservation initiatives/efforts can be grouped as follows:

1. Closure program in the south of Honduras
2. Initiatives led by NGOs in co-management areas
3. Initiatives managed by NGOs and Private Foundations

Conservation initiatives/efforts in the Caribbean region are led by NGOs and don't have specific agreements per species. However, monitoring protocols and legally binding

proposals promoting and facilitating the conservation of the species present in the Caribbean region are being developed.

The closure program is legally endorsed (Ministerial Decree in force since 2003), and states the non-consumption of eggs or byproducts of the Olive ridley sea turtle during the first 25 days of September. The activities are coordinated by the local authorities from Choluteca, with funding from governmental and private institutions, and the participation of the members of local communities.

II. BIOLOGIC INFORMATION

Lepidochelys olivacea has been reported on the Pacific coast (*Golfo de Fonseca*) since 1975 by teachers and students that have provided some data about this population. The program has gone through ups and downs, therefore, there are gaps in the records of the sea turtles nesting. NGOs have supported the program and have conducted tagging studies, as well as the use of satellite transmitters, studies on hatchlings survival, showing effectiveness in the program.

The species is distributed throughout most of the tropical seas of the world, and its nesting grounds are in these areas. It is also found in subtropical seas which they use for their migration movements. Their populations are considerably big in the Eastern Pacific; higher concentrations are found in Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, in the south of Panama and Colombia. It is also found in Ecuador, Peru and the north of Chile.

Although *arribadas* are characteristic of the species, there are no records of these events in the area of *Golfo de Fonseca*. According to fishermen and people from the local community, whose criterion was used to establish the closure period, the absence of *arribadas* could be due to the *Golfo de Fonseca* sea access and sea currents in the area. However, in recent years, many fishermen have reported that the dates are changing and to preserve the species at its maximum this needs to be reviewed.

III. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL INFORMATION

In the area of *Golfo de Fonseca* one of the main economic activities is fishing. For the coastal communities of Marcovia this is their main activity. Fishermen from the four villages additionally add to their income by collecting sea turtle eggs during the nesting season, this activity is commonly called “*tortuguear*”. Besides these main activities, and seasonally, the community grows sugar cane, cantaloupe, and watermelon. They could also work with business dealing with shrimp. The egg collectors (*tortugueros*) are people that always have carried out this activity. On the other hand, there is another group that only collects eggs during the period of the closure (Veda –name in Spanish).

IV. MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Closure program in the South of Honduras

First efforts on sea turtle conservation in Honduras started in 1975. Currently, the Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) Conservation Program is based on the Closure Decree (No. 765-02) August 27th, 2003 issued by DIGESPESCA and enforced by Golfo de Fonseca Commission of Environmental Verification. The closure (veda) decree prohibits trading or selling sea turtle eggs between September 1st and 25th every year, which is called the period of Closure (Periodo de Veda).

The program has five conservation camps to protect sea turtles, located in El Venado, Cedeño, Carretales, Boca de Rio Viejo and Punta Ratón. During the closure, there are patrols with the engagement of the community, volunteers, and members of the army, between 9:00 p.m. and 3:30 a.m. The clutches identified are collected and taken to a hatchery. In exchange, the participants receive food to compensate the costs of not collecting eggs during this time.

The *L. olivacea* program in *Golfo de Fonseca* is in need of a review. Data has been gathered regarding the number of eggs collected, number of live hatchlings and the number of sea turtles released since 1975. To this date, approximately 370,000 hatchlings have been released. However, data on the number of females during the nesting season, the number of egg collected off closure season, and the clutches/nests during the closure season have not been recorded.

The *L. olivacea* program has a strong community component, coordinated by a multi-sectorial entity called CVC-Golf. This entity organizes the collectors (tortugueros) in each community in camps. Each participant is given a ration of food with basic products of the Honduran diet. However, the need for technical and scientific support to collect robust data for decision making and to help to understand the population dynamics of the species has been identified.

From the case presented here we propose that the effectiveness of the closure (veda) program in Honduras *Golfo de Fonseca* be reviewed, as well as the management and implementation of a regional closure in the three countries (Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador) that makes Golfo de Fonseca.