PROGRESS REPORT ON PANAMA EXCEPTION
CIT-COP6-2013-R1
REPORT 2016-2019

Progress report on the implementation of Resolution CIT-COP6-2013-R1 on Exceptions under Article IV (3a and b) for subsistence harvesting of *Lepidochelys olivacea* eggs in Guatemala and Panama.

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Information should be presented concisely.

In accordance with Resolution CIT-COP6-2013-R1 adopted by the Sixth Conference of Parties of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (COP6), the following measures are recommended to Guatemala and Panama to comply with article IV on Exceptions requirements:

1) The COP recommends that Panama and Guatemala apply the precautionary approach by implementing the Protection Measures below, in accordance with the national laws governing the exceptions, and to continue to consult with the IAC Committees while the countries gather the suggested technical information and implement actions in the recommendations below so that the exceptions meet the requirements of article IV (3) of the Convention.

2) The level of sea turtle eggs being harvested under an exception must be proven to be sustainable and therefore, monitoring protocols must be in place to assess the stability of the population in the long-term. These protocols must include nesting trends in order to support the sustainability of the harvesting proposed. The IAC Scientific and Consultative Committees can provide proper guidance on how to prepare or review a monitoring protocol, if requested by the Party.

3) Each country must continue to report on their exception in their annual reports as well as on the implementation of the measures described below. The Scientific and Consultative Committees will continue to review the progress of the implementation of this resolution and report to the Conference of Parties the progress of the implementation.

4) In addition to the recommendations below, specific to Guatemala and Panama, the CCE concurs with the guidance provided by the Scientific Committee to both countries contained in Annex I.

On the exception presented by Panama:

1) Immediate Actions (1-2 Years)

a. Increase the size of the "natural hatchery" stretch of beach and/or move it to encompass more of the nesting while ensuring that this protected area fulfills the standard technical requirements of a hatchery. Quantify and report in real numbers of total nesting, how many nests are being protected by this method.

b. Increase and document the control and protection of nests in the designated hatchery zone of Cañas Island.

c. Strengthen co-management of the harvest with the Cañas Island community, including training of participants. Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles Sixth Conference of the Parties June 26-28, 2013 – Isla Santa Cruz, Galápagos, Ecuador CIT-COP6-2013-R1

d. Promote protection efforts, non-consumptive use, and operation of hatcheries in communities surrounding Cañas Island.

e. Provide data on hatchlings that specifies whether they represent actual numbers of hatchlings released or estimated numbers of hatchlings from counting whole shells.

Write Yes/ No/ P= in progress
Isla Cañas Wildlife Refuge is referred in this document as RVS

Immediate actions - Panama	**Year 3 (2016)**	**Yes/ No/ P**	**Year 4 (2017)**	**Yes/ No/ P**	**Year 5 (2018)**	**Yes/ No/ P**
Increase the size of the "natural hatchery" stretch of beach (See 1a).	• **Ongoing data collection to determine the area where the natural hatchery stretch of beach will be expanded.**	**No**	• **Nesting data collection is ongoing in each site of the natural hatchery. The natural hatchery area was expanded 200 m towards Punta Banco, increasing the protection. This area has proper conditions to guarantee full development of sea turtles reproductive cycle.**	**No**	• **The natural hatchery remains marked and signaled, including the extra 1000 m.** • **The Natural Nesting area keeps proper conditions for clutches protection.** • **Nests are kept in their natural state.**	**Yes**
Quantify total nesting (see #1a)	• **Daily monitoring is ongoing, to quantify nesting in Isla Cañas.** • **A total of 792 nests of olive ridley were protected.**	**Yes**	• **Sea turtle monitoring is ongoing, protecting a total of 4,966 nests thus far.**	**Yes**	• **There are records of nesting within the natural hatchery stretch by sector and in total.** • **A total of 6,500 nets of olive ridley sea turtle were protected.**	**Yes**
Increase control/protection of clutches in Isla Cañas´s hatchery (see #1 b).	• **The Environmental Police supports night monitoring which increases clutches protection.**	**Yes**	• **Four units of the Environmental Police have been assigned to support the Ministry of Environment and guard the clutches successfully, increasing the number of nests protected.**	**Yes**	• **There is support from units of the Environmental Police, to guard the nests in Natural Nesting Areas that jointly with the Ministry of Environment staff collect information for the Sea Turtle Monitoring Program.** • **A member of the Peace Corps provides technical support to collect the information. Members of the community already trained, also support monitoring some nights of the week.**	**Yes**

Strengthen co-management of the harvest with the (see #1c).	• **Members of the community interested in participating in sea turtle conservation actions are trained. Every Tuesday and Thursday the locals go to the beach to collect clutches to relocate them in artificial hatcheries.**	**p**	• **Ongoing training for locals supporting clutches collection on Tuesdays and Thursdays, to relocate them in artificial hatcheries. However, more people are required for more efficient control of poaching by irresponsible locals.**	**P**	• **A continuous training program for locals and the community is being planned. Funding is one of the main challenges.**	**Yes**
Training of Isla Cañas community (see #1c).	• **With IAC funding a group of women from Isla Cañas was trained on the making of handicrafts as a source of income for their families. Likewise, members of the community were trained on monitoring of nesting beaches. Beach cleanups were carried out jointly with the local school and the community, encouraging youngsters to take care of Isla Cañas beaches.**	**Yes**	• **Tourist guides from Isla Cañas receive support and training to provide the best service. However, more funding is required to continue training the members of the community.**	**Yes**	• **Training on sea turtle conservation, fisheries, and conservation of species was provided to the community.** • **Training Workshops for locals on monitoring, research, and management techniques (2 workshops); Workshop on fisheries threats; Monitoring techniques and work with sea turtles, and a consultation workshop on the Protocol for the Use of Sea Turtle Eggs which has not yet been approved, but has been discussed with the community.**	**Yes**
Promote protection efforts, non-consumptive (see #1d).	• **The project "Fattening and commercialization of Oysters" is ongoing. This activity is carried out along with the Aquaculture, Fisheries and Agrotourism Association of Isla Cañas (ACPAT in Spanish) since 2014, thanks to the knowledge and training the group has received from the**	**Yes**	• **More funding is required to implement projects to reduce olive ridley´s sea turtle eggs harvesting by Isla Cañas community.**	**No**	• **We are waiting for the other Cooperative that has shown interest, to obtain their legal identity to again propose a community-government-private alliance.**	**No**

	staff of ARAPs General Direction on Research and Development. • **Shellfish culture is an attractive and low-cost activity, as the animals do not require food, in contrast to another type of cultures such as shrimp or fish. The members of the community carry out periodic cleanup of the baskets for the oysters to reach an appropriate size hence can go for selling. Oysters culture is an alternative provided by ARAP to the coastal communities aiming to provide food, jobs, improve their economy and reduce other aquatic resources exploitation. This is also an alternative to prevent the sale of sea turtle eggs outside the marine protected area.**					
Provide data on hatchlings (see #1e).	• **59,833 hatchlings of olive ridley from artificial hatcheries and nests *in situ* have been released.**	**yes**	• **Olive ridley hatchling´s release has increased. Around 405535 hatchlings from artificial protection systems and *in situ* have been released.**	**Yes**	• **There is a nesting record from the Natural Hatching Area.** • **There is a sea turtle monitoring protocol in place.** • **Artificial hatcheries produced a total of 26,354 olive ridley hatchlings.** • **A hatching record of de 5,600 nests within the natural hatchery stretch. By counting shells there is an estimated production of 174,299 hatchlings of olive ridley.**	**P**

2) Midterm Activities (1-5 Years): the government of Panama together with the IAC develops a management plan for Cañas Island, including objectives and indicators.

Panama´s Exception Management Plan: In accordance with the midterm activities in the Resolution, an Exception Management Plan must be presented in the 5th year of the Exception. Attach the document and fill in the table below.

Panama Midterm Activities The government of Panama together with the IAC develops a management plan for Cañas Island, including objectives and indicators. (see #2).
Year 3 (2016): • There is information on sea turtle monitoring since 2014 which will help to develop the Management Plan. The Protected Areas Direction announced that for the following year, there will be an opening for the consultancy to develop the Management Plan.
Year 4 (2017): • The company CEPSA (Consultores Ecológicos Panameños, S.A.) was chosen as the consultant to develop Isla Cañas Management Plan, this began on January 2018, with a document ready within 6 months.
Year 5 (2018): • With the products from the consultancy: "Development of an Institutional Situational Diagnosis of RVS Isla Cañas, Sea Turtle Monitoring Program implementation, and Adjustments of RVS Isla Cañas hatchery" information was updated between January and December 2018 through an Ecologic Rapid Assessment (ERA) and a Participative Rural Assessment (PARA), which were used for developing RVS Isla Cañas Management Plan. • Continuous monitoring and patrolling have been carried out until December 2018, with the support of the Environmental Police and Environmental Economy Students who are volunteers from the University of Panama. • Sea turtle tagging program is ongoing • Follow up on marking and separation by sectors of the 14 km of beach and the Natural Nesting Area. Every 100 m there is a mark and the poles that have been damaged or vandalized are repaired. • Maintenance of two artificial hatcheries in the beach with capacity for 220 and 225 nests respectively. Materials to build up the cylinders to protect the nests with anti-bugs mesh and for patrolling were obtained. • Relevant scientific information is collected systematically providing for the compliance with the IAC exception. • Adjustment of two hatcheries for the relocation of nests exposed to depredation. • Days of sea turtle nests collection and relocation in hatcheries, with the members of the community and the Environmental Police. • There is a database to record nesting information and nests relocated. • Monitoring and patrolling until December 2018, with staff from the RVS supported by the Environmental Police and Environmental Economy students from the University of Panama.

Annex I

Additional Guidance Suggested for Panama

Mark with an X what has been implemented

- ☐ Use published biological data on sea turtles to interpret abundance trends, thereby reducing the possibility that the changes in numbers observed nesting are being wrongly attributed to hatcheries.
  Observation: Data collected to this point are not robust enough for establishing trends, day and night monitoring continues.

- ☒ Consider the possibility that there might be mixing of animals with those from other nesting colonies in the Eastern Pacific and that increases in numbers of nesting turtles may result from conservation measures being implemented at other locations.
  Observation: Females from the RVS have been marked since 2015, and marks have been monitored as part of the Monitoring Program. However, no females marked in previous seasons at the RVS Isla Cañas have been recorded. A marking program was implemented when the diagnosis to establish the protected area was carried out. A total of 314 olive ridley females nesting in Isla Cañas have been marked so far, similarly, there is communication with other beaches regarding sea turtles marked and nesting in other beaches.

- ☒ Maintain the management of nests as close as possible to natural conditions.
  Observation: The natural hatchery is guarded daily to guarantee that a most of nests are kept under natural conditions. Nest relocated in artificial hatcheries are mainly a product of actions carried out to encourage the community to protect sea turtles.

- ☒ Handling of eggs must be avoided to the greatest extent possible. Time outside of the sand should be minimized, since prolonged exposure to elements outside of their natural incubation environment significantly reduces the embryos' chance of survival. Therefore, eggs must be buried within the shortest time possible and with the least amount of handling. Eggs received as donations or confiscated eggs that might be contaminated must be reported and managed outside of any hatcheries.
  Observation: Relocation should not take more than four hours, which is an optimal timeframe to avoid embryo´s damage. Excellent results have been obtained thus far with a hatching success above 80%, showing that measures to handle the eggs are appropriate. Nesting results show that the methods used in our two artificial hatcheries are successful.

- ☒ Use existing technical manuals to manage the exception in order to implement the suggestions mentioned. A technical institution of the country requesting the exception should endorse these manuals. It is up to the Party country presenting the exception if they wish that the IAC SC review their manual.
  Observation: All existing manual are considered to implement the appropriate methods on sea turtle monitoring, hatcheries operation, biometric data collection, management of information, identification of species, among others.

☐ X Establish the control, registration, and management of hatcheries, which must include a full survey and identification of all the nests collected.
Observation: All clutches relocated in artificial hatcheries are recorded (date, species, amount of eggs, emerging hatchlings, hatching success, among others).

☐ X Develop and apply strict inspection, surveillance and control measures in order to ensure that all egg collectors comply with the required mandatory submission of eggs and try to get them to submit complete nests instead of only a fraction of them.
Observation: Staff from the Ministry of Environment supported by the Environmental Police carries out beach patrolling. There is an eggs use protocol, although it has not been implemented yet as an inventory of the families involved in this use is being carried out. Eggs collection is allowed for the consumption of registered members of the community. Patrolling, control and surveillance are carried out along the 14 km of the beach.

☐ Establish spatial or seasonal closures on exploited beaches to protect the rest of the turtle species from exploitation.
Observation: *Chelonia mydas* occurrence has been observed, as well as *Eretmochelys imbricata* in the mangrove area.

☐ X Establish partnerships with other organizations, institutions, and NGOs in order to guarantee sea turtle conservation and research.
Observation: There are efforts to involve organizations, especially educational institutions (Schools, Universities, and NGOs), in sea turtle protection and conservation, and beach cleanups. There is work to establish strategic alliances and cooperation agreements with organized members of the community.

☐ X Implement training and education campaigns in order to better manage and reduce egg consumption
Observation: There is training for students, teachers and the National Police, in order to join forces to create awareness among the local communities on the importance of sea turtle conservation. There is not a formal training and education campaign to better manage and reduce eggs consumption, but workshops with the community have been carried out to train them on biology, sea turtle research and monitoring and on the importance of sea turtles conservation.

☐ X Propose alternative economic activities, including those that use sea turtles in a non-consumptive manner. Countries with exceptions should strive to present at least one model community where this is being done successfully and is technically appropriate.
Observation: La Marina Beach Reserve is being used as a model area where there is a massive arrival of sea turtles and no human populations. As the Ministry of Environment manages the area, only four people from the Ministry, which includes three biologists, is found in the area. Also, in Mariato District, Veraguas Province, *Agua y Tierra* foundation is developing a co-management model with the community Mata Oscura, where the community actively participates in sea turtle protection, conservation, and research activities. An Eco-tourism Program was developed with the Fishing and Ecotourism Agriculture Association (AAPEQ) established in 2007 by nine people concerned about

sea turtles. AAPEQ succeeded in creating a Fauna and Flora Educational Center, and in 2012 created a mangrove path so the tourist visiting Rusia mangroves either on foot or in kayaks, relax in nature, learn about mangrove species and observe howler monkeys, white-faced monkeys and birds found in this wetland. The Ministry of Environment is planning for similar activities in the RVS, given its potential for tourism.

☐ X Designate or allocate sufficient human resources and funds to succeed in correctly managing the exception

Observation: The need to obtain human and financial resources to support protection, management, and conservation in Isla Cañas Wildlife Refuge has been stated. It is important that the Ministry of Environment through its Protected Areas and Biodiversity, and Coasts and Seas Direction are able to obtain resources required to strengthen the actions in the RVS within the framework of the Resolution CIT-COP6-2013-R1 on Exceptions under Article IV (3a and b) for subsistence harvesting of *Lepidochelys olivacea* eggs in Guatemala and Panama.

The Ministry of Environment has the institutional commitment of allocating human and financial resources to achieve proper management of the exception. There are efforts to obtain funding for equipment and per diems, and a Chief for the Wildlife Refuge Isla Cañas has been appointed. More staff needs to be appointed to work within the RVS as two people are not enough to carry out the whole process and develop the corresponding reports.