



**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

**RESOLUTION ON EXCEPTIONS UNDER ARTICLE IV (3A AND B) FOR
SUBSISTENCE HARVESTING OF LEPIDOCHELYS OLIVACEA EGGS IN
GUATEMALA AND PANAMA**

Recalling that Article IV of the Convention, paragraph 2a states that the Parties have prohibited the intentional capture, retention or killing of, and domestic trade in, sea turtles, their eggs, parts or products;

Further recalling that Article IV, paragraph 3a states that each Party may allow exceptions to satisfy economic subsistence needs of traditional communities, taking into account the recommendations of the Consultative Committee of Experts established pursuant to Article VII, provided that such exceptions do not undermine efforts to achieve the objective of this Convention;

Noting that at the fifth Conference of Parties that procedures for cases where exceptions exist was adopted (CIT-COP5-2011-R2);

Considering that *Lepidochelys olivacea* is classified as vulnerable, a status recently given to the species by the IUCN;

Acknowledging that all other species of sea turtles classified as “endangered,” must be protected from any negative impacts resulting from an exception;

Recognizing that *Lepidochelys olivacea* on the beaches of the Eastern Pacific (Mexico to Panama) is the only turtle species 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;”

Considering that these exceptions existed prior to Panama and Guatemala joining the IAC, and that today they remain under the control of the different relevant governmental organizations;

Considering that the review of the technical information presented by the IAC Scientific Committee in their 9th meeting and Consultative Committee of Experts in their 5th meeting revealed insufficient data to determine the sustainability of use of turtle eggs in these countries.

PROTECTION MEASURES RECOMMENDED TO GUATEMALA AND PANAMA TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF ARTICLE IV (3) REGARDING EXCEPTIONS:

- 1) The COP recommends that Panama and Guatemala apply the precautionary approach by implementing the Protection Measures below, in accordance with the



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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 the Annex I.

On the exception presented by Guatemala:

- 1) Immediate Actions (1-2 Years)
 - a. The Government of Guatemala promotes appropriate legislation to ensure that the harvesting of olive ridley sea turtle eggs (*L. olivacea*) is sustainable in the long term and conforms to the text of the Convention.
 - b. In the interim, increasing the percentage of eggs that must be deposited in hatcheries to at least 30%, preferably 40%, until more detailed data on population size is available.
 - c. The Government of Guatemala must ensure that the harvesting of olive ridley (*L. olivacea*) eggs proposed in the exception does not impact other species, thus adopting appropriate legal measures and policies to avoid this.
- 2) Midterm Activities (1-5 Years): the government of Guatemala develops a management plan that contains, among other items, the following:
 - a. Using the best available information, identify the level of sustainable harvesting that does not negatively impact the exploited population, and that must be achieved in the medium term through a gradual reduction of the current level of harvesting.



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- b. With technical guidance from the IAC, establish a program for long term monitoring of the population that includes goals and indicators.
- c. Considering that egg harvesting responds to an economic subsistence need of the coastal traditional communities, economic alternatives must be sought that address these subsistence needs in order to reduce the harvest to sustainable levels.
- d. Gather additional technical information
 - i. Data should be included on monthly nest activity, nest predation, and natural nest mortality and survivorship on the nesting beach.
 - ii. Information on the organizations participating in and the resources allocated to the management of the exception.
 - iii. Information should be provided on all hatcheries, with full descriptions of egg handling, nest density, and other hatchery procedures.
 - iv. Additional information on the economic aspects of turtle egg harvesting in Guatemala is requested with a socio-economic study of the beneficiaries of the egg harvest and justification for traditional use.
 - v. The effects the of increased nearshore predation caused by hatchling release from hatcheries and ways to reduce this effect should be identified.
 - vi. An evaluation of the impact of illegal trade on the exception presented is recommended.

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.



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- 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.
- 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.

Annex I

Additional guidance suggested for Guatemala and Panama

- 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.
- 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.
- Maintain the management of nests as close as possible to natural conditions.
- 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.
- 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.
- Establish the control, registration and management of hatcheries, which must include a full survey and identification of all the nests collected.
- 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.
- Establish spatial or seasonal closures on exploited beaches to protect the rest of the turtle species from exploitation.



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- Establish partnerships with other organizations, institutions and NGOs in order to guarantee sea turtle conservation and research.
- Implement training and education campaigns in order to better manage and reduce egg consumption.
- 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.
- Designate or allocate sufficient human resources and funds to succeed in correctly managing the exception.