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ILLEGAL TRADE IN MARINE TURTLES AND THEIR PRODUCTS FROM THE CORAL TRIANGLE REGION



WWF Discussion Paper

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Introduction

Marine turtles in the Coral Triangle are under threat from poaching and illegal trade of whole turtles and their products including turtle eggs.

The Coral Triangle is home to six of the seven known species of marine turtles including green, hawksbill, loggerhead, flatback, olive Ridley, and leatherback. All species have been assessed at risk of extinction in the IUCN's Red List and are all listed as Vulnerable to Critically Endangered, except for Australia's data deficient endemic flatback turtle.

Despite international protection, many populations are being driven to critically low levels by unsustainable capture and use, and demand for illegal trade. The history of marine turtle poaching in South East Asia is not a new issue. Turtles are used mainly for food, souvenirs, jewellery and ornamentation, and in some traditional medicinal systems. The shells of hawksbill turtles (known as bekko) have been carved into ornaments and jewellery for many centuries, originally associated with Japanese traditional crafts.

These activities are driven by market demand within and external to the Coral Triangle and are exacerbated by irregular (non-standard) laws between countries and within countries. Where laws do exist often there is a lack of enforcement and limited communications between government enforcement agencies. Aside from local consumption and commercial sale of meat, eggs and tortoiseshell products, the demand and illegal trade of marine turtle shell (and other derivative parts) is being driven by market destinations including Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam and Korea.

Threat of poaching is not just by fishermen and poachers encroaching national waters of Coral Triangle countries, but also as part of the Live Reef Food Fish Trade and agents from external countries (e.g. China) funding local fishermen and community members to illegally catch and gather turtles for trade. In addition to direct trade, trade online is taking place in the Coral Triangle with souvenirs from hawksbill turtle shells found online at Facebook, Instagram, and E-commerce sites in Indonesia.

The TRAFFIC report *An Examination of Marine Turtle Trade in China and Japan* (2012), highlights a consistent illegal trade route to mainland China from the Coral Triangle region of Southeast Asia (mainly Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines) (Lam et al., 2011). Recorded evidence of poaching and trade, within and between these countries continue, especially within the Sulu Sulawesi Seascape (IOSEA, 2014; Daily Express, 2014; REF).

The tortoise shell trade industry remains intact and is clearly identified as a major issue for Southeast Asia where it is also believed poachers may now be traveling to more distant areas within foreign and territorial seas to maintain their hunting quotas (Lam et al., 2011). As such, there are also concerns about the level of coordination in Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands, with further investigation required of cross-border trade from Papua New Guinea, and between West Papua and Indonesia (Kinch and Burgess, 2009).

Marine turtles in the Coral Triangle are already facing threats of extinction from pressures of domestic hunting for meat and eggs, from bycatch in commercial fisheries, and increasingly from impacts to their habitats and nesting beaches as a result of human activities, predators and climate change. Illegal trade activities add to these threats. Efforts in the past several years have been taken to identify the extent of the trade (*Market Forces: An Examination of Marine Turtle Trade in China and Japan: A TRAFFIC East Asia Report; An Assessment of the Trade in Hawksbill Turtles in Papua New Guinea: TRAFFIC Bulletin*) and workshops held to develop actions at national and regional levels to combat illegal trade and poaching.

National Actions

In June 2014, TRAFFIC and WWF facilitated a workshop in the Philippines on *Marine Turtle Trade in the Coral Triangle*. Government representatives from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam provided details on national level efforts to tackle illegal trade and highlighted what additional national and regional actions were needed. Actions included ramping up local enforcement to deal with the local side of the international trade and better coordination across government ministries and agencies to improve external communication and international interventions.

Other national issues raised included understanding enforcement issues clearly and clarifying overlaps or gaps in jurisdiction, clarifying the roles of various government agencies and strengthening the ability of agencies to enforce marine turtle issues, training enforcement officers in marine turtle identification, and developing an awareness programme targeted at consumers and buyers of marine turtle products.

In particular, port and airport officers should be trained to identify and encouraged to confiscate marine turtle products, there should be a comprehensive public awareness program, and a detailed market study to identify all key players including manufacturers and flow-through systems. Like rhinos and elephants, marine turtles are intrinsically valuable. Raising awareness of the biological value of marine turtles amongst local villagers and communicating that not one community, island, state or nation owns a marine turtle is also required and themes of sovereignty and pride should figure highly in such awareness programmes. Similar to tackling rhino or elephant wildlife trade, a network of community-based marine turtle monitors (rangers) provides empowerment and ownership to protect valuable resources.

In August 2016, WWF hosted a *Regional Hawksbill Crisis Workshop* in Australia because one of the largest nesting populations for hawksbill turtles in the world is forecasted to collapse (>90% decline) by 2020 (Limpus, 2008). Participants from various agencies and relevant organisations in Australia, Indonesia, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste identified major factors contributing to hawksbill declines in the Indo-Pacific region, and concrete actions required to aid recovery of Australasian and Coral Triangle populations.

Driven by an unsustainable domestic and illegal commercial demand (of meat, eggs and shell), a strong regional collaboration developing and enforcing national and international conservation laws and agreements was agreed as the essential first step to halting regional population declines, whilst implementing national on-ground action and addressing knowledge gaps. Some of the mechanisms outlined in the workshop included to engage more meaningfully with enforcement agencies (e.g. Australian Quarantine Inspection Service, Australian Fisheries Management Authority, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), and other national government bodies) and implement interventions at several scales to reduce hawksbill mortality and increase hatchling production (e.g. international waters, IUU, local MPAs, sustainable use of reef, on-ground monitoring, compliance, etc.). Although focused on hawksbill turtles, delegates raised the importance of addressing the use and demand of all marine turtle species throughout the Coral Triangle, with similar national actions identified in the 2014 workshop. *Note, the 2016 workshop notes are currently being reviewed for final delegate approval.*

A key action called for at the TRAFFIC/WWF workshop in 2014 was for Coral Triangle countries to undertake a review of their National Plans of Action (NPOAs) to ensure issues related to marine turtle trade are included such as additional training for enforcement agencies and the formulation of multi-agency task forces, as is done in Malaysia.

Regional Actions

National level actions need to be supported with inter-regional cooperation and transboundary actions.

The TRAFFIC/WWF workshop held in the Philippines in 2014 identified a suite of regional actions including:

- Improve intergovernmental cooperation in combating trade on a regional level such as strengthening local and trans-boundary law enforcement efforts;
- Promote better sharing of data and information among countries on trade; and
- Harmonize laws in and between Coral Triangle countries.

The 2016 WWF workshop in Australia also identified regional actions to reduce the demand of hawksbill product and hawksbill turtle mortality, including:

- Undertake rapid assessments of the cumulative take and market supply chains of turtle shell trade (legal and illegal) throughout Australasia and Melanesia;
- Educate, influence, and advocate for stronger compliance and enforcement to existing international protection mechanisms, and increase regional cooperation through legal and non-binding agreements (CITES, IOSEA, CTI-CFF); and
- Engage better with enforcement agencies and implement intervention at several scales (e.g. support regional data sharing, coordinate learning exchanges, establish a network of community-based turtle monitors and management agreements, provide alternative livelihood options, etc.)

Both the 2014 and 2016 workshops identified that opportunities for regional cooperation include the use of all existing bilateral and multilateral agreements, which are enabling mechanisms. This includes the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA-MoU), Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), RMFOs, ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN), and CTI-CFF as regional mechanisms.

At the CITES COP17 in October 2016, additional text was introduced into the hawksbill document on reporting implementation of CITES measures, which will see the Secretariat now covering all marine turtles and not just hawksbills to undertake “a study on the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles, *inter alia* to research its status, scope and trends, conservation impacts and management options, and to identify areas where immediate mitigation efforts may be needed” (subject to funding). This decision also included reiterating regional cooperation to address relevant recommendations arising from the IAC 2014 study.

https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/17/Com_I/E-CoP17-Com-I-14.pdf

2014 Coral Triangle Marine Turtle Trade Workshop Communique:

Government representatives who attended the 2014 TRAFFIC/WWF workshop committed to improve intergovernmental cooperation to curb the illegal trade of marine turtles in the Coral Triangle through a **Workshop Communiqué**:

We, the participants of the Coral Triangle Marine Turtle Trade Workshop from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Viet Nam,

Recognize that:

Marine turtles are important components of marine biodiversity, vital to the health of marine ecosystems, which in turn provide food and livelihood to millions of people in the region;

Each of our countries is facing the challenge of systematic poaching of marine turtles and their eggs from our national waters and beaches;

Demand for marine turtles and their derivative parts outside of SE Asia is driving the illegal and unsustainable trade with negligible benefits to our own people;

The trade in marine turtles and their eggs is threatening the survival of these species, all of which are faced with extinction.

Acknowledge that:

It is our shared responsibility to ensure the protection of marine turtles to secure the health of marine environments for present and future generations;

National governments of marine turtle source countries play the lead role in curbing the illegal and unsustainable trade;

There is an urgent need to strengthen national law enforcement to prevent directed takes of marine turtles and eggs within their habitat range.

Agree to:

Call for neighboring countries relevant to the trade to join our efforts to address this issue;

Improve intergovernmental cooperation in combating marine turtle trade on a regional level, including multi-agency collaboration on law enforcement action;

*Promote better sharing of data and information among countries on marine turtle trade;
Share best practices in handling marine turtle trade issues along the trade chain from source to market;*

Enhance scientific research on marine turtles;

Raise awareness among key stakeholders (including maritime communities, fishing fleets, traders, processors, retailers, and end-consumers) on the need to stop illegal and unsustainable marine turtle trade.

4 June 2014, Makati City, Philippines

Historical Recommendations on the Illegal Take and Trade of Marine Turtles in the Indo Pacific Region

Over recent years, the national and international illegal trade in marine turtles and their derivatives has been largely under-reported by the 35 Signatory States of the IOSEA Memorandum of Understanding, despite indications that illegal trade in the region was expanding. The report on the *Illegal Take and Trade of Marine Turtles in the IOSEA Region* was produced by the IOSEA Secretariat in 2014 to examine the key patterns and trends since the year 2000, as well as to review measures taken by governments, intergovernmental bodies, and NGOs to tackle the issue. The report found that:

- Consumption of turtle meat occurs in 75% of IOSEA Signatory States, with trade in turtle shells mainly occurring in East Asian countries;
- The direct exploitation of turtles – for their meat, eggs or shells – is largely concentrated in the Coral Triangle region, which includes the waters of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste;
- Within the Coral Triangle region, much of the poaching appears to occur in Indonesian waters. In 2012, the country's authorities warned that international trafficking of marine turtles was on the rise nationwide due to increasing demand from East Asian countries; and
- The main regional trade route for whole turtles and turtle derivatives seems to originate in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The products are shipped mostly to East Asia, where demand is reportedly on the rise – both Chinese demand for turtle meat and medicine, and Japanese and Taiwanese demand for traditional crafts made of turtle scute. From 2000 to 2008, over 9,180 marine turtle derivatives were reportedly traded between the two regions.

A summary of the potential areas for improvements in combatting illegal trade in marine turtles and their products discussed in the IOSEA report included:

- Harmonizing and enhancing the surveillance and enforcement of existing legislation;
- Conducting more thorough research into current turtle markets (direct or online market) and the socio-economic drivers of demand;
- Exploring and developing opportunities for alternative livelihoods to turtle poaching and illegal trade, such as turtle-based tourism;
- Tackling demand by raising public awareness; and
- Enhancing regional cooperation by working with appropriate bodies, including CITES, INTERPOL, the ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN),

the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime, and relevant NGOs including TRAFFIC, ProFauna Indonesia, and WWF.

Recommendations for Regional Action in the Coral Triangle

Along with the suggested areas of improvement in the 2014 IOSEA Secretariat report, the 2014 *Workshop on Marine Turtle Trade in the Coral Triangle*, held in the Philippines by TRAFFIC and WWF, and the 2016 *Regional Hawksbill Crisis Workshop* held in Australia by WWF, provides a suite of recommendations which could be channeled through to the relevant national agencies in the Coral Triangle countries via the Threatened Species Working Group of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries & Food Security (CTI-CFF).

For transboundary actions, the opportunity for initiating regional cooperation is through existing mechanisms in the region such as the CTI-CFF, the ASEAN-WEN and also the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity with its focus on ASEAN protected area systems.

Currently, ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network is being redeveloped and merged with the ASEAN Experts Group on CITES as part of ASEAN's ongoing efforts to streamline. WWF understands that there will be a workshop in 2017 on the merger of the two groups and this will present an opportunity for countries to provide input into the Wildlife Enforcement Network and ASEAN Experts Group on CITES' strategic planning for addressing issues on illegal wildlife trade, particularly in recommending actions for increased inter-regional collaboration on marine turtle trade and for engaging with destination countries sourcing marine products (e.g. China, Korea, and Japan).

It is also an opportunity to strengthen links between the CTI-CFF and ASEAN to secure support to the CTI-CFF on threatened species and trade issues and for marine area protection.

In addition, the following initiatives within ASEAN on marine turtle conservation could be relevant in CTI-CFF's marine turtle species and trade issues work: (i) ASEAN Fisheries Working Group in relation to coordination and implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on ASEAN Sea Turtle Conservation and Protection; and (ii) SEAFDEC strategic partnership with ASEAN on marine issues, including collaborative work on sea turtle conservation and protection.

The following recommendations are presented as actions that the countries of the Coral Triangle region can consider either separately or as part of the CTI-CFF or ASEAN-WEN:

- 1) Agree that the TRAFFIC/WWF Report from the *Workshop on Marine Turtle Trade in the Coral Triangle*, held in the Philippines in June 2014, and the WWF Report from the *Regional Hawksbill Crisis Workshop*, held in Darwin in August 2016¹, be referred to the appropriate national agencies in the Coral Triangle countries for review and action as appropriate;
- 2) Endorse the *Workshop on Marine Turtle Trade in the Coral Triangle* Communique of June 2014;
- 3) Coral Triangle countries seek participation in future strategic planning processes for the reformed ASEAN-WEN and ASEAN Experts Group on CITES with a priority on actions including those from the 2014 *Marine Turtle Trade in the Coral Triangle Workshop* Communique:
 - Calling for neighboring countries relevant to the trade in marine turtles and their products to join efforts to address this issue;
 - Improve intergovernmental cooperation in combating marine turtle trade on a regional level, including multi-agency collaboration on law enforcement action;
 - Promote better sharing of data and information among countries on marine turtle trade;
 - Share best practices in handling marine turtle trade issues along the trade chain from source to market;
 - Enhance scientific research and community-based monitoring on marine turtles, including the impacts of climate change on marine turtles; and
 - Raise awareness among key stakeholders (including maritime communities, fishing fleets, traders, processors, retailers, and end-consumers) on the need to stop illegal and unsustainable marine turtle trade.
- 4) Explore opportunities within ASEAN, such as the Wildlife Enforcement Network, the Center for Biodiversity, the Fisheries Working Group and the ASEAN-SEAFDEC strategic partnership, to support Coral Triangle countries on species and trade issues including a review of NPOAs to ensure issues related to marine turtle trade are included; and
- 5) Explore opportunities to work with regional organisations such as TRAFFIC and relevant partners to undertake a regional assessment of marine turtle use and trade, including the identification of the market supply chains and routes.

¹ Report to be available in January 2017

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Workshop Report on *Marine Turtle Trade in the Coral Triangle*, Philippines 3-4 June 2014, by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (Philippines), TRAFFIC, Department of State (USA), Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) & WWF
http://d2ouvvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/workshop_on_the_trade_in_marine_turtles_in_the_coral_triangle.pdf

WWF Report (DRAFT) from the *Regional Hawksbill Crisis* workshop, Darwin, Australia, August 2016 (undergoing endorsement review)

Jackie Thomas
Leader, WWF Coral Triangle Coordination Team
16 December 2016

WWF in numbers

130 Million

people living in coastal areas in the Coral Triangle that directly depend on marine resources for food and livelihood

**USD
1 Billion**

market value of live reef food fish trade in the Coral Triangle

**USD
1 Billion**

value of tuna exports from Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and the Philippines alone

**USD
150 Billion**

expected annual revenue generated by nature-based tourism in the Coral Triangle by 2035



Why we are here.

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

wwf.org