Draft resolution on the enhanced protection and management [Japan : replace “protection and management” by “conservation”] of sea turtle breeding, feeding and nursery areas and the designation of key areas as Ramsar Sites

Submitted by France and Senegal

Action required:

- The Standing Committee is invited to study and validate the draft resolution below for its consideration and desired approval at the 13th Session of the Conference of the Parties.
- The implementation of this resolution does not require any financial means of the Ramsar Convention Secretariat.

Introduction

1. In its Article 2 regarding the List of Ramsar Sites, the Ramsar Convention considers that the ecological functions of wetlands as habitats supporting a characteristic flora and fauna are fundamental. The choice of sites can be based on their international importance from a zoological point of view, as waterfowl habitat, but not exclusively. Sea turtles constitute a group that meets Criterion 2.

2. Moreover, Point 1 of Article 4 of the Convention also specifies that for all wetlands, the Contracting Parties should promote the conservation of wetlands and waterfowl by establishing nature reserves, whether they are included in the List or not, and they should provide adequately for their wardening.

11. The Convention also already took resolutions concerning the marine turtles: RECALLING Resolution VII.21 of the Ramsar Convention on the need to enhance the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands, notably seagrass beds, mangroves and rocks that several species including sea turtles need to feed and grow;

12. ALSO RECALLING Resolution VIII.4 of the Ramsar Convention on wetland issues in integrated coastal zone management;

13. ALSO RECALLING Resolution VIII.32 of the Ramsar Convention on the conservation, integrated management, and sustainable use of mangrove ecosystems and their resources, which are important for the feeding and growth of some sea turtle species, as are coral reefs;
3. This draft resolution aims to urge the Parties on the one hand to reinforce the conservation and management measures for wetlands presenting challenges for the marine turtle target species and, on the other hand, to designate them as Ramsar Sites or reinforce their protection by other legal means.

Draft resolution XIII.xx

Enhanced protection and management of sea turtle breeding, feeding and nursery areas and the designation of key areas as Ramsar Sites

1. RECALLING that the seven species of sea turtle (Dermochelyidae: *Dermochelys coriacea*; Cheloniidae: *Chelonia mydas*, *Caretta caretta*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Lepidochelys olivacea*, *Lepidochelys kempii*, *Natator depressa*) have an unfavourable conservation status from vulnerable to critically endangered and ALSO RECALLING that in order to live and survive these species depend on the conservation of their breeding, feeding and nursery zones, which are marine and coastal areas;

2. CONSIDERING that furthermore all sites that are home to individuals belonging to the abovementioned species meet Criterion 2 of the Convention for inclusion in the List of Ramsar Sites, and that consequently, the Ramsar Convention should play a role as mobiliser by encouraging the Parties to strengthen their actions in favour of the wetlands that are essential to these species;

3. ALSO CONSIDERING that sea turtles are included in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) also known as the Washington Convention (Appendix I), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) also known as the Bonn Convention (Appendices I and II), the Inter-American Convention -for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (CIT) for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles, the Cartagena Convention, the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution or the Barcelona Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity or the Rio Convention, and regional agreements (IOSEA, the Abidjan MoU), which encourage their respective Parties to provide better protection for sea turtles;

4. NOTING the existence of numerous tools and mechanisms on an oceanic scale such as for example for the South Pacific and Western Pacific, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Conservation Action Plan, the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS), and the Single Species Action Plan for the Loggerhead Turtle *Caretta caretta* in the South Pacific Ocean adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the CMS in Quito in November 2014 [USA : replace with the Indian Ocean Southeast Asian Marine Turtle MOU (IOSEA)];

5. NOTING ALSO that some sea turtle subpopulations have increased in certain areas by the various efforts for conservation;

6. CONCERNED by the fact that several regional populations of sea turtle are facing a high risk of extinction, and NOTING the degradation of their coastal habitats, the significant impact from
fisheries bycatch the great impact of by-catches at sea and also NOTING the excessively high mortality rates due to the taking of eggs, the destruction of adult females on the nesting beaches by local human populations and the impact of introduced predators [Venezuela: replace “introduced predators” by “the exotic invasive species”], in addition to predation and natural mortality of the eggs and hatchlingsnewly hatched turtles;

7. HIGHLIGHTING the fact that during their life cycle sea turtles use a wide variety of coastal habitats such as intertidal zones, estuaries, mangroves, rocks, seagrass beds, coral reefs;

8. CONSIDERING that marine and coastal feeding and nursery areas, in particular seagrass beds, coral reefs and mangroves, are often threatened physically and chemically by mineral, industrial and port, and hotel infrastructures as well as other human activities (agriculture, household and industrial effluents);

8. Oceania with slight rewriting : §. RECOGNISING the role of traditional owners, indigenous peoples local communities in turtle conservation and management

9. CONSIDERING that the protection of nesting beaches, marine and coastal feeding and nursery areas will allow the survival rate of adult female, newly hatched and immature turtles to increase;

10. NOTING that UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.25 “Promoting Conservation of Critical Intertidal and Other Coastal Habitats for Migratory Species” adopted by the Twelfth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) (Manila, October 2017) urges CMS the Parties to conserve intertidal and coastal habitats for migratory species;

11. NOTING that 114 Ramsar Sites and 53 Contracting Parties already provide habitat for at least one species of sea turtle (see the annexed table);

11. RECALLING Resolution VII.21 of the Ramsar Convention on the need to enhance the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands, notably seagrass beds, mangroves and rocks that several species including sea turtles need to feed and grow;

12. ALSO RECALLING Resolution VIII.4 of the Ramsar Convention on wetland issues in integrated coastal zone management;

13. ALSO RECALLING Resolution VIII.32 of the Ramsar Convention on the conservation, integrated management, and sustainable use of mangrove ecosystems and their resources, which are important for the feeding and growth of some sea turtle species, as are coral reefs;

12. RECOGNIZING that the memorandum of understanding on sea turtles of the Atlantic coast of West Africa adopted resolutions whose application can help improve the conservation of sea turtles;

13. RECALLING that a MoU has been signed between IAC and the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention and that its goal is to join the efforts made in the Frame of the Ramsar Convention and IAC, with the aim of building capacities for the Parties of both Conventions to identify and strengthen the conservation and rational use of Ramsar sites.
14. URGES [USA : replace with ENCOURAGES] the Contracting Parties whose coastlines contain sea turtle breeding areas, nesting beaches [Japan : add “important” before “nesting beaches”], coastal and marine feeding and nursery areas, to identify index nesting and foraging sites these sites and ensure the populations are monitored as precisely as possible, in order to improve our knowledge of the distribution, numbers and state of health of each of the species involved;

15. URGES [USA : replace with ENCOURAGES] the Contracting Parties to strengthen the conservation and management of the zones those identified index nesting and foraging sitesd, and notably if possible to designate them as Ramsar Sites, based on Criterion 2, all the nesting sites and feeding and nursery habitats of the various species of sea turtle, and to strengthen this designation through the promulgation of the appropriate protective measures in accordance with their legislation, in particular through the creation of marine protected areas, as appropriate;

16. ENCOURAGES the Contracting Parties to develop and implement management plans for these sites, by integrating specific operations means for the protection or restoration of breeding, nesting, feeding and nursery habitats for the different species;

17. RECALLS that sea turtles are migratory and ENCOURAGES the Contracting Parties to consult each other, and work through existing regional agreements such as the Indian Ocean Southeast Asian Marine Turtle MOU, the Abidjan Agreement, SPREP and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles, the Action Plan for the Loggerhead Turtle in the South Pacific Ocean, the IOSEA Network of Sites of Importance for Marine Turtles, in the framework of the CMS and of the Barcelona Convention, in order to protect habitats in networks allowing for greater safety for sea turtles during their life cycle and in their movements;

18. STRESSES the urgent need to take, whenever possible, the measures required to reduce the lightning and the erosion of the beaches used for breeding and to fight against the impact of predators introduced [Venezuela : replace “introduced predators” by “the exotic invasive species”] to these sites, and to develop good practices to sensibilise the inhabitants of coastal zones;

19. [USA : delete §20]RECOMMENDS that the Contracting Parties, research institutes and organisations devoted to the protection of coastal and marine biodiversity set up integrated conservation programmes, which can call on responsible and regulated ecotourism, including support for the training of guides and the launching of village community aid programmes, in order to increase respect for immature and adult turtles, their nests and their habitats, which can generate greater and more sustainable financial resources than poaching and the exploitation of dead turtle by-products (meat, fat, shells);

20. [USA : delete §21]CALLS ON the International Organizations to join forces to establish, in collaboration with all the stakeholders, regional cooperation, notably inside Ramsar regional initiatives, and at least in each key habitat, for the sea turtle’s terrestrial and coastal cycle, an effective programme to monitor the conservation of sea turtle habitats at all stages of the animals’ life cycle: eggs, hatchlings, juveniles and adults of both sexes.
21. **ENCOURAGES** Contracting Parties to review their Ramsar site management plans to seek to ensure they include sea turtle conservation actions, as appropriate;

22. **REQUESTS** the Secretariat to work with the secretariats of the Inter-American Sea Turtle Convention and the Indian Ocean Southeast Asian Marine Turtle MOU under the Convention on Migratory Species to further sea turtle conservation in Ramsar sites, and where possible and subject to the availability of resources, for these secretariats to work with Contracting Parties to include sea turtle conservation actions in their Ramsar site management plans.
Existing Ramsar Sites with coastal and marine sea turtle habitats

Jacques Fretey and Patrick Triplet
February 2018

Species involved (nesting beaches, nursery areas, feeding areas)*:

\[ \text{Lepidochelys olivacea} = \text{Lo (IUCN Red List status: Vulnerable)} \]
\[ \text{Lepidochelys kempii} = \text{Lk (IUCN Red List status: Critically Endangered)} \]
\[ \text{Chelonia mydas} = \text{Cm (IUCN Red List status: Endangered)} \]
\[ \text{Chelonia agassizii or C. mydas agassizii} = \text{Ca (IUCN Red List status: Endangered)} \]
\[ \text{Cc = Caretta caretta (IUCN Red List status: Endangered)} \]
\[ \text{Eretmochelys imbricata} = \text{Ei (IUCN Red List status: Critically Endangered)} \]
\[ \text{Dermochelys coriacea} = \text{Dc (IUCN Red List status: Vulnerable)} \]

In red: Site considered to be a hotspot of regional or international interest for the species

*Note: Depending on the description of the Site; there may be errors in the identification of species or lack of knowledge about existing habitats

**List of sites to be added**:
- "Bahía de Samborombón (N° 885) with the following turtles species: Chelonia mydas (Cm), Caretta caretta (Cc) and Dermochelys coriacea (Dc)
- Región: América Latina : Nº 59 - Nº Sitio: 290 - Bañados del Este y Franja Costera, Cerro Verde - Especies: Lo, Cm; Cc; Dc
- Japan : Yakushima Nagata-hama, the largest nesting beach for North Pacific population of Loggerhead turtle
- Asie-India : ‘Bhitarkanika’ which is one of the worlds largest rookeries of the Olive Ridley turtle
- Australian list to be inserted
- Exhaustive list to be established by the secretariat

**North America – Central America Region**

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**Insular Caribbean Region**

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<td><em>First site to be designated as a Ramsar Site due to the importance of the terrestrial habitat for sea turtles</em>**</td>
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**South Pacific – Oceania Region**

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**Asia Region**

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**Mediterranean Region**

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Selon les systématiciens spécialisés sont reconnues 7 ou 8 espèces de tortues marines appartenant aux familles des Cheloniidés et des Dermochéliidés. Toutes (sauf *Natator depressus* dont les populations sont insuffisamment connues) ont un statut IUCN Red List allant de "vulnérable" à "en danger critique d’extinction".

Lorsque le Pr Archie Carr de l'Université de Floride, lança un cri d’alarme au milieu des années 50 à l’attention des États et de la communauté scientifique, annonçant un déclin des populations mondiales des tortues marines, les raisons anthropiques de cette situation paraissaient simples à combattre. Le massacre sur les plages de ponte des tortues femelles adultes et le braconnage des nids semblaient les activités humaines quasi uniquement responsables du déclin. Les schémas de Mortimer (1995) expliquaient alors très bien comment fonctionnait ce déclin du fait d’une maturité sexuelle excessivement tardive.
Les études scientifiques démontrent clairement que dans les conditions naturelles, les tortues marines, malgré une importante prédation naturelle dans les premières années de vie, ont une grande longévité et un grand pouvoir de reproduction.

Sur un grand nombre de plages de ponte furent créés à partir des années 1970 des projets associant recherche, identification des tortues femelles, surveillance des nids et sensibilisation des villageois. Les résultats des campagnes de conservation sont longs à obtenir puisque pour une espèce comme *Chelonia mydas* il faut attendre une cinquantaine d’années avant d’espérer une reproduction de tortues issues de nids protégés.

Quelques points noirs de massacres et de braconnage subsistent encore, surtout en Afrique occidentale.

Une surexploitation des adultes pour la viande, la graisse, l’écaille, depuis des siècles et la destruction totale de tous les nids sur de nombreuses plages ont conduit les populations de tortues à s’affaiblir considérablement à partir du XXe siècle. Progressivement de nouvelles menaces anthropiques sont apparues, comme la dégradation et l’aménagement des plages de ponte et l’enlèvement du sable, la pollution physique et chimique des eaux côtières, les captures accidentelles dans les engins de pêche (bycatch), l’entortillement dans des filets fantômes, la prédation des œufs et des tortues nouveau-nées par des espèces animales introduites ou envahissantes (rats, mangoustes, fourmis, coléoptères...), des porcs ou des chiens errants, le dérangement des femelles sur les plages de nidification par des lumières ou un tourisme non contrôlé, l’artificialisation du littoral...

Autrefois, lorsqu’un villageois tuait une tortue pour nourrir sa famille, ce n’était pas plus grave pour la population concernée de tortues que la prédation naturelle d’une tortue de ce même stock, par exemple, par un Orque. Avec l’ouverture de villages vivant jusqu’alors en autarcie, l’envie d’acheter des produits manufacturés a nécessité l’utilisation d’argent donc le besoin d’en obtenir. Le commerce, voire le trafic transfrontalier, de produits issus des tortues marines était un moyen rapide de trouver de l’argent, mais a conduit à une augmentation des prélèvements sur les populations naturelles. Les quelques tentatives de ranching et farming n’ont fait qu’augmenter les prélèvements et augmenter les demandes commerciales, donc le braconnage.

Une érosion du littoral affecte de nombreux sites de ponte. L’érosion naturelle, en milieu tropical, est aggravée parfois fortement par les aménagements anthropiques tels que les épis, enrochements ou autres, qui engendrent des modifications dans les courants littoraux, voire la création de ports industrielo-minéraux. Par le trafic intense des navires, une menace supplémentaire s’ajoutera.

Le réchauffement climatique sera demain une nouvelle menace dont on peut déjà imaginer les répercussions sur la reproduction des tortues marines. La montée des eaux marines supprimera des plages de ponte, surtout en milieu insulaire. L’élévation de la
température du substrat conduira, par le jeu du déterminisme du sexe par la température en cours de développement embryonnaire, à une féminisation des populations.

Quelle que soit l’espèce, le cycle de vie nécessite toujours des zones d’accouplement, soit très près des côtes soit au large, et des plages où les femelles viennent creuser un nid et déposer des œufs qui seront abandonnés sans couvaison.

Il nécessite également une période dite "année perdue" où les tortues nouveau-nées s’éloignent des côtes, puis un retour vers une aire de croissance côtière.

Selon les espèces et les populations régionales, les adultes sont résidents ou bien effectuent de très longues migrations entre aires d’alimentation et sites de ponte. Plus une femelle sera en bonne santé et aura une alimentation riche, plus ses pontes seront rapprochées et nombreuses. En rapport direct avec l’alimentation et l’âge, les tortues marines sont plus ou moins inféodées à des zones côtières rocheuses, à des récifs coralliens, à des herbiers, à des estuaires, à des mangroves...

La Convention sur la conservation des espèces migratrices appartenant à la faune sauvage (connue également sous le sigle CMS ou en tant que Convention de Bonn) vise à conserver les espèces migratrices terrestres, marines et aériennes dans l’ensemble de leur aire de répartition. La CMS a un rôle unique à jouer en attirant l’attention sur les 76 espèces en danger inscrites actuellement à l’Annexe I. Toutes les espèces de tortues marines, à l’exception de *Natator depressus*, sont inscrites à Annexe I de la CMS. A l’Annexe II sont inscrites les espèces migratrices, dont les tortues marines, qui ont besoin ou qui bénéficieraient notablement d’Accords de coopération internationale au titre de la CMS. Ceux-ci peuvent aller de traités juridiquement contraignants à des mémorandums d’accords moins formels. La Convention de Bonn, avec des instruments régionaux multi-espèces tels que le Mémorandum d’Accord sur les mesures de conservation des tortues marines de la côte atlantique de l’Afrique (MdA d’Abidjan) et le Mémorandum d’Entente sur la conservation et la gestion des tortues marines et de leur habitat de l’océan Indien et de l’Asie du Sud-Est (IOSEA) est devenue la convention de référence pour ces espèces.
Il existe déjà plus d’une centaine de sites Ramsar concernés directement par des habitats de tortues marines.

Les rivages de la Basse-Mana en Guyane française ont été le premier classement Ramsar (numéro 643) d’un site en raison de son intérêt international pour la nidification d’une espèce de tortue marine (*D. coriacea*), en plus de l’intérêt pour ses oiseaux d’eau. Ce classement Ramsar a permis d’accélérer les procédures de mise en réserve naturelle nationale, donc d’améliorer la conservation de ces habitats exceptionnels et de supprimer la destruction des tortues et le braconnage des nids.

La proposition de résolution vise à inciter les Parties concernées à développer des mesures de protection accompagnées de plans de gestion sur les habitats de reproduction, d’alimentation et de croissance, et à désigner comme sites Ramsar les habitats présentant les enjeux les plus importants pour ces espèces.

Jacques Fretey
*Senior Advisor IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group*
*Coordonnateur scientifique du Mémorandum d’Abidjan CMS/PNUE*
*Président de Chélonée*