EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: MARINE TURTLES

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
Commission des Thons de l'Océan Indien
iotc ctoi

Status of marine turtles in the Indian Ocean

TABLE 1. Marine turtles: IUCN threat status for all marine turtle species reported as caught in fisheries within the IOTC area of competence.

Common name	Scientific name	IUCN threat status[1]
Flatback turtle	*Natator depressus*	Data deficient
Green turtle	*Chelonia mydas*	Endangered
Hawksbill turtle	*Eretmochelys imbricata*	Critically Endangered
Leatherback turtle	*Dermochelys coriacea*	
(N. East Indian Ocean subpopulation)		Data deficient
(S. West Indian Ocean subpopulation)		Critically Endangered
Loggerhead turtle	*Caretta caretta*	
(N. West Indian Ocean subpopulation)		Critically Endangered
(S. East Indian Ocean subpopulation)		Near Threatened
Olive Ridley turtle	*Lepidochelys olivacea*	Vulnerable

Sources: Marine Turtle Specialist Group 1996, Red List Standards & Petitions Subcommittee 1996, Sarti Martinez (Marine Turtle Specialist Group) 2000, Seminoff 2004, Abreu-Grobois & Plotkin 2008, Mortimer et al. 2008, IUCN 2014, The IUCN Red List of Threatened species. Version 2015.2 <www.iucnredlist.org>. Downloaded on 15 July 2015.

INDIAN OCEAN STOCK – MANAGEMENT ADVICE

Stock status. No assessment has been undertaken by the IOTC WPEB for marine turtles due to the lack of data being submitted by CPCs. However, the current International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) threat status for each of the marine turtle species reported as caught in IOTC fisheries to date is provided in Table 1. It is important to note that a number of international global environmental accords (e.g. Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as well as numerous fisheries agreements obligate States to provide protection for these species. In particular, there are now 35 Signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA MoU). Of the 35 Signatories to the IOSEA MoU, 23 are also members of the IOTC. While the status of marine turtles is affected by a range of factors such as degradation of marine turtle natural habitats and targeted harvesting of eggs and turtles, the level of mortality of marine turtles due to capture by gillnets is likely to be substantial as shown by the Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)[2] presented in 2018. Stock assessments of all species of marine turtles in the Indian Ocean are limited due to data insufficiencies as well as limited data quality[3].

[1] IUCN, 2017. The process of the threat assessment from IUCN is independent from the IOTC and is presented for information purpose only
[2] A.J. Williams, L. Georgeson, R. Summerson, A. Hobday, J. Hartog, M. Fuller, Y. Swimmer, B. Wallace, and S.J. Nicol 2018 Assessment of the vulnerability of sea turtles to IOTC tuna fisheries. WPEB14-40.
[3] Wallace BP, DiMatteo AD, Bolten AB, Chaloupka MY, Hutchinson BJ, et al. (2011) Global Conservation Priorities for Marine Turtles. PLoS ONE 6(9): e24510. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0024510

Bycatch and mortality from gillnet fisheries has greater population-level impacts on marine turtles relative to other gear types, such as longline, purse seine and trawl fisheries in the Indian Ocean[4]. Population levels of impacts of leatherback turtles caught in longline gear in the Southwest Indian Ocean were also identified as a conservation priority.

Outlook. Resolution 12/04 *On the conservation of marine turtles* includes an annual evaluation requirement (para. 17) by the Scientific Committee (SC). However, given the lack of reporting of marine turtle interactions by CPCs to date, such an evaluation cannot be undertaken. Unless IOTC CPCs become compliant with the data collection and reporting requirements for marine turtles, the WPEB and the SC will continue to be unable to address this issue. So far, reporting of sea turtle interactions are not described at the species level. It is recommended that CPCs now declare interactions indicating the sea turtle species. Guides for species identification are available at http://iotc.org/science/species-identification-cards. Notwithstanding this, it is acknowledged that the impact on marine turtle populations from fishing for tuna and tuna-like species will increase as fishing pressure increases, and that the status of the marine turtle populations will continue to worsen due to other factors such as an increase in fishing pressure from other fisheries or anthropological or climatic impacts.

The following should also be noted:

1. The available evidence indicates considerable risk to marine turtles in the Indian Ocean.
2. Given the high mortality rates associated with marine turtle interactions with gillnet fisheries and the increasing use of gillnets in the Indian Ocean[5] there is a need to both assess and mitigate impacts on threatened and endangered marine turtle populations.
3. The primary sources of data that drive the ability of the WPEB to determine a status for the Indian Ocean, total interactions by fishing vessels or in net fisheries, are highly uncertain and should be addressed as a matter of priority.
4. Current reported interactions are known to be a severe underestimate.
5. The Ecological Risk Assessment[6] estimated that ~3,500 and ~250 marine turtles are caught by longline and purse seine vessels, respectively, per annum, with an estimated 75% of turtles released alive[7]. The ERA set out two separate approaches to estimate gillnet impacts on marine turtles, based on very limited data. The first calculated that 52,425 marine turtles p.a. and the second that 11,400–47,500 turtles p.a. are caught in gillnets (with a mean of the two methods being 29,488 marine turtles p.a.). Anecdotal/published studies reported values of >5000–16,000 marine turtles p.a. for each of India, Sri Lanka and Madagascar. Of these reports, green turtles are under the greatest pressure from gillnet fishing, constituting 50–88% of catches for Madagascar. Loggerhead, hawksbill, leatherback and olive Ridley turtles are caught in varying proportions depending on the region, season and type of fishing gear.
6. Maintaining or increasing fishing effort in the Indian Ocean without appropriate mitigation measures in place, will likely result in further declines in marine turtle populations.
7. Efforts should be undertaken to encourage CPCs to investigate means to reduce marine turtle bycatch and mortality in IOTC fisheries.

[4] Wallace, B. P., C. Y. Kot, A. D. DiMatteo, T. Lee, L. B. Crowder, and R. L. Lewison. 2013. Impacts of fisheries bycatch on marine turtle populations worldwide: toward conservation and research priorities. Ecosphere 4(3):40. http:// dx.doi.org/10.1890/ES12-00388.1 (figure 13)
[5] IOTC-2017-WPEB13-18

[6] R. Nel, R.M. Wanless, A. Angel, B. Mellet & L. Harris, 2013. Ecological Risk Assessment and Productivity -Susceptibility Analysis of sea turtles overlapping with fisheries in the IOTC regionIOTC–2013–WPEB09–23

8. That appropriate mechanisms are developed by the Compliance Committee to ensure CPCs comply with their data collection and reporting requirements for marine turtles.