

FUTURE PLAN FOR SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT IN CAMBODIA

Ing Try, Deputy Director of Fisheries Department

*# 186, Preah Norodom Blvd, P. O. Box 582, Phnom Penh, CAMBODIA
Tel./Fax: (855-23) 219 256; E-mail: tmmp.cam@bigpond.com.kh*

ABSTRACT

The Royal Government of Cambodia has ratified several international conventions and MoUs that involve sea turtle conservation and management. Sea turtles have been protected and conserved since 1997 after Cambodia became a CITES member. The results from present study indicate that some islands in Cambodia are the main habitat for sea turtles and they are caught accidentally by some fishing gears such as trawl net, hook and line, purse seines, gill nets and traps. In response to these issues, the Royal Government of Cambodia as well as the Department of Fisheries have set up programmes on the conservation and management of sea turtles and their habitats in Cambodia, which are implemented in collaboration with national and international donors for protecting and conserving sea turtles for the Cambodian new generation. The programmes are concerned with some aspects as: Research, Management, Education and Stakeholder participation.

INTRODUCTION

Cambodia as other countries in the region and sub-region has ratified several international conventions and MoUs that involve sea turtle conservation and management, such as CITES, Biodiversity Convention and ASEAN's MoU on sea turtle conservation and protection.

Sea turtles have been protected and conserved since 1997 after Cambodia became a CITES member. At that time conservation and protection of sea turtles was not so strictly observed. However, Cambodia became a full member of ASEAN on 30th April 1999 and SEAFDEC member on 22nd January 2002. Therefore, Cambodia needs to respect and accept the MoU of ASEAN Sea Turtle Conservation that was signed by the old nine ASEAN member countries.

Recently, the Department of Fisheries has conducted a survey on sea turtles in Cambodia. This

indicated that some islands in Cambodia are the main habitat for sea turtles and that they are caught accidentally by some fishing gears such as trawl net, hook and line, purse seines, gill nets and traps. The most harmful fishing gear is stingray hooks and line. Moreover, egg collection occurs illegally in many places in Cambodia (Tana, 1997; Try, 1999)

In response to these issues, conservation strategies have been initiated by the Cambodian government as well as the Department of Fisheries but due to lack of information on sea turtles, particularly population structure, breeding grounds, nesting sites, feeding grounds and migratory pattern. Therefore scientific research is needed as the first priority.

Moreover, there is a lack of capacity of the technical staffs and also, government budget for conducting

research has been limited. So in order to improve this situation, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries through the Department of Fisheries seeks close cooperation and collaboration with national and international NGOs and donors to conserve and protect all endangered species such as sea turtles by implementing projects on extension and public awareness (Try et al., 2002).

The aim of this paper is to inform the national and international NGOs and other agencies to be aware that so far the Royal Government of Cambodia have programmes on the conservation and management of sea turtles and their habitat in Cambodia. These programmes are implemented by the Department of Fisheries under collaboration with national and international donors for protecting and conserving sea turtles for the Cambodian new generation. The objectives of this programme are the following:

- i. To protect and conserve sea turtles and their habitats within the Cambodian EEZ.
- ii. To collect information about sea turtles within the Cambodian EEZ.
- iii. To prevent and mitigate effects of accidental capture of sea turtles in Cambodian EEZ.
- iv. To prevent all commercial use of sea turtles and products made from sea turtles in the whole country.
- v. To participate in regional and international networks on research, conservation and management of sea turtles.
- vi. To increase public awareness about endangered marine life, in particular sea turtles.
- vii. To build capacity of the Department of Fisheries staffs about sea turtle ecology, survey techniques, and handling.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

In order to achieve the above objectives, the Department of Fisheries wishes to initiate activities within the following aspects:

Research

- * Set up a program for identifying critical habitats such as nesting beaches, inter-nesting, resting areas and inshore feeding grounds. This program should include counting and tagging of nesting females, counting nests, and recording

of recapture data.

- * Establish a local hatchery at a protected nesting beach.
- * Collaborate with sea turtle experts from countries around the Gulf of Thailand to gather information about migrations and population structure of sea turtles in the region.
- * Establish partnerships with international organisations and NGOs to obtain funding for research and conservation of sea turtles.

Management

- * To present sufficient scientific information for the legislature to draft an amendment of a proclamation or sub-decree to protect and conserve critical habitats.
- * To gather local information on the biology and ecology of sea turtles and disseminate information to all coastal authorities and communities through training, workshops, seminars, newspapers, radio and television and exhibitions about life histories of our sea turtles.
- * To enforce the prohibition of all trade in sea turtles and sea turtle products, including confiscation of impounded goods.

Education

- * Educate the local people to understand, conserve and manage endangered marine fauna and flora by producing pictorial teaching materials for use in schools and community centers. In particular we plan to produce a 4-page pamphlet containing illustrations about sea turtle conservation.
- * To create awareness in local communities about the endangered status of sea turtles through publications, dissemination, and workshop participation.
- * To share experiences and knowledge with local communities and staff about identification and formulation of research activities.
- * To initiate, in collaboration with international organisations and local NGOs, activities aimed at raising awareness within Cambodian government and authorities about sea turtle conservation and management.

Stakeholder participation

- * To encourage local communities to become involved in conservation of sea turtles and other vulnerable and/or endangered species and to

provide information to communities about how they can make a difference in ensuring that the species are protected for future generations throughout Cambodia.

- * Collaboration between the Department of Fisheries staffs, fishermen and manufacturers of fishing gear to modify the harmful fishing gear as stingray hooks and line. Alternatively, the operation of harmful fishing gears could be

modified (closed areas, closed seasons and/or limitation in total number of allowed gears).

- * To involve the policy makers to integrate conservation and development motives. Whether these plans will be achieved or not depends on international and national cooperation and specially for the donor agencies and scientists around the world to assist poor countries.

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