

The Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources

PRESS RELEASE

1st October 2008

ENHANCED PROTECTION OF MARINE TURTLES IN THE BAHAMAS

1. The Bahamas Government has determined to enhance the protection extended to marine turtles found in Bahamian waters. This is in keeping with the Government's commitment to pursue appropriate conservation policies and strategies so as to safeguard the marine and terrestrial environment. This also responds to concerns expressed by citizens and by local and international non-governmental organizations to the Government of The Bahamas calling for strengthened protection of marine turtles in The Bahamas.
2. Already, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) considers all marine turtles, globally, to be either "threatened" or "endangered". The listing of marine turtles under Appendix I of the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to which The Bahamas is a Party, prohibits international trade in turtles and their by-products except under strict conditions.
3. All marine turtles roam vast distances and occupy a variety of different marine habitats during the course of their lives. As such they are truly shared species.
4. Five of seven known species of marine turtles are found within the waters of The Bahamas. These are the Green, Loggerhead, Hawksbill, Leatherback and Olive Ridley turtles. While all five (5) species forage for food within Bahamian waters, all except the Olive Ridley are known to use Bahamian beaches as nesting sites.
5. The harvesting of Loggerhead and Green Turtles is of some social and cultural importance among certain communities and individuals for food purposes; this however, is not for the majority of Bahamians. The fishery based on these two (2) species is not regarded to be a major source of income for the average commercial fisherman.
6. Protections now extended to marine turtles under current Fisheries Regulation provide for:
 - a. Specific minimum harvestable size limits for the Green and Loggerhead turtles;

- b. The full protection of the Hawksbill Turtle;
 - c. All species of turtles are protected on beaches and everywhere during the closed season for turtles (1st April – 31st July);
 - d. The taking of turtle eggs is prohibited; and
 - e. All turtles harvested are to be landed intact to allow for inspection.
7. The Department of Marine Resources, having regard to the vulnerability of marine turtles locally and throughout their ranges, purposes the following enhanced protection of marine turtles:
- a. With effect from **31st October 2008** to extend full protection to the Olive Ridley Turtle and Leatherback turtles;
 - b. With effect from **31st December 2008** prohibit the commercial harvest, purchase, or sale of all species of marine turtles found within the Bahamian exclusive economic zone, and/or of their by-products such as their shells;
 - c. With effect from **1st April 2009** extend full protection to all marine turtles found in the exclusive economic zone by prohibiting the harvesting of all marine turtles except with the permission of the Minister for scientific research, public display or educational purposes.
8. The Department of Marine Resources invites comments from the general public with regard to proposed enhanced protections to be extended to marine turtles as outlined above. Comments should be addressed to:

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