



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

**PROTECTION OF LEATHERBACK TURTLES
(*DERMOCHELYS CORIACEA*) FROM FISHING IMPACTS
IN THE INDIAN OCEAN**

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As recorded in the report of the twelfth session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission's (IOTC) Scientific Committee (SC), Resolution 09/06 On Marine Turtles applies to leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) in its entirety and that the term 'hard-shelled' should be removed from the resolution. The thirteenth Scientific Committee meeting again endorsed this recommendation.

Australia is concerned that the reference to 'hard-shelled' may not afford the same level of protection for leatherback turtles that is provided to other marine turtle species through the current IOTC resolution. Australia is also concerned that the text in Paragraph 4 of Resolution 09/06 may be a source of ambiguity and subsequently be a cause for non-compliance with the resolution.

The executive summary for leatherback turtles produced by the SC in conjunction with the Indian Ocean-South-East Asian Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (IOSEA) notes that leatherback turtles are the most wide ranging marine turtle species and migrate significant distances throughout the world's oceans, including through the eastern and western Indian Ocean. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations further notes that the Indian Ocean has a number of important nesting sites for leatherback turtles: Indonesia, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal.

The SC noted the status of leatherback turtles is considered to be critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The SC continues to note that data on interactions with fishing gear remains largely preliminary, but that incidental catch is likely to be high, particularly in gillnet and longline fisheries. The SC has continued to note that members and cooperating non-contracting parties are not reporting marine turtle interactions with fishing operations which limits the understanding of the status of the species in the IOTC Area of Competence.

Recognising the concerns of turtle experts around the world and the critically endangered status of leatherback turtles, Australia considers that amending Resolution 09/06 to ensure that leatherback turtles are afforded the same level of protection as other marine turtle species, including the collection and submission of data and fostering the recovery of leatherbacks, if caught, is an important step in mitigating the impact of tuna fishing on other marine species.

Australia, with interested members, intends to put forward a proposal to the 16th Annual Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission to remove the reference to 'hard-shelled' from Resolution 09/06. Australia is seeking endorsement or co-sponsorship of the proposal from other members.

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