

# REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP ON REGIONAL COOPERATION TO ADDRESS DIRECT CAPTURE OF SEA TURTLES

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KUALA TERENGGANU, MALAYSIA

ORGANISERS  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA TERENGGANU  
MARINE RESEARCH FOUNDATION  
WWF CORAL TRIANGLE PROGRAM  
HAINAN NORMAL UNIVERSITY

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**ANNEX I**  
**OPENING SPEECH BY Y. BHG. DATO' HAJI MOKHTAR NONG**

Workshop organizers, co-conveners, sponsors and delegates.

Welcome to Malaysia, and to our State of Terengganu, where 'Nature Embraces Heritage'. It is both timely and relevant that you all gather here to address sea turtle conservation at a regional level. Timely, because our understanding of turtle biology tells us we need to act swiftly and decisively. Relevant, because Terengganu is home to some of Malaysia's major sea turtle nesting beaches and you can understand why we take sea turtle conservation so very seriously here.

Malaysia has a long history of turtle conservation, dating back over 50 years. One of the earliest sea turtle hatcheries was in fact established in Terengganu. Pioneering turtle research has been carried out right here in Malaysia, and our scientists are well known internationally. For this reason I find it a pleasure indeed to welcome all of you, and to wish you the best in your upcoming deliberations.

As you may be aware, critically endangered sea turtles from South East Asia are being targeted by fishing vessels from around the region. These boats leave port with the express purpose of catching marine turtles, a practice which is illegal both in their home country and in the waters of countries in which they fish. The last half a decade has seen such a noteworthy increase in this practice that scientists and managers such as myself need to look much more closely to determine the severity of this practice. How much poaching goes unrecorded or undetected? How severe are the impacts to turtle populations? What drives this trade, and how can it be curtailed? More importantly, what can we do about it? This is where I see the absolute relevance of your upcoming workshop.

Did you know that in 2002 a foreign vessel was found with more than 100 sea turtles within the Philippines Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary? In 2003, Bali police arrested five suspected turtle poachers and rescued 120 green turtles in a boat raid. In 2004, Malaysian authorities apprehended twelve foreign nationals in Malaysian waters with another 160 dead turtles. In 2005, researchers discovered a hidden turtle net with almost 150 turtles entangled and drowned. In 2006, marine police in Bali again seized a boat loaded with 158 green turtles. In 2007 Malaysian authorities seized a foreign trawler in waters off Sabah with more than 200 protected green and hawksbill turtles, of which only 20 were still alive. Also in 2007 newspapers reported shocking news of 397 dead turtles discovered by Indonesian authorities aboard a foreign vessel. Disturbingly, authorities believe that the boat crew purchased the turtles from local fishermen, indicating the trade has diversified and local people were also involved.

As you can see ladies and gentlemen, this is a widespread and alarming conservation issue. How well we address this issue might mean the difference between continued survival of SE Asian turtle populations, or a regional catastrophe.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our local sea turtle experts Prof. Chan Eng Heng from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Dr. Nicolas Pilcher from the Marine Research Foundation in Sabah, and Mr. Kevin Hiew, from the WWF Coral Triangle Program in Kuala Lumpur, and also Prof. Shi Hai Tao from the Hainan Normal University, for having taken the bold step to organise this workshop. I would also like to thank their co-conveners, Conservation International (Philippines), the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group, and my own State Government.

Terengganu has enjoyed considerable development over the past 30 years with its rapid industrialization and growing economic activity, but historically farming and fishing were our main economic activities. Our State will astound you with its extraordinary mix of exotic flora and fauna, as we are home to some of the most spectacular wonders of the natural world, including 130 million-year-old rainforest and the largest man-made lake in Southeast Asia. More fittingly however, is our reverence to our turtles. Terengganu has always been synonymous with turtles and not just sea turtles, but the endangered river and painted terrapins as well. Recent visitors from the Turtle Survival Alliance in America has dubbed our state as the last stronghold in the world for these two riverine species. I am proud to let you know all major nesting beaches in Terengganu have been gazetted as turtle sanctuaries where 100% of the eggs deposited are protected and incubated.

I could go on and on about the natural wonders of our State, and the warmth of our people, but I would rather let you experience them all first hand. I know my colleagues here and the people of our wonderful State will make you feel welcome, and I am sure you will treasure your memories of your stay here. I wish you the very best in your deliberations and look forward to a renewed effort to save sea turtles, which I assure you our Government will fully support.

Once again, selamat datang ke Malaysia dan Terengganu, and have a wonderful stay.