

COUNCIL APPROVES SEA TURTLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS



Participants of the August 2009 STAC meeting: (l-r) Irene Kinan-Kelly, Nicolas Pilcher, Anne Trevor, Tetha Hitipeuvu, Milani Chaloupka, Kitty Simonds, Asuka Ishizaki, Peter Dutton, Yoshimasa Matsuzawa, George Balazs, Hoyt Peckham, Takashi Ishihara, Hiroyuki Suganuma

At its Oct. 20-23, 2009, meeting in Honolulu, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council accepted all of the recommendations of its Sea Turtle Advisory Committee (STAC). The recommendations include continued support of the Turtle Research and Monitoring Database System (TREDS) and of sea turtle conservation projects in Japan and Indonesia as well as consideration of projects on genetic analyses, necropsy and ageing. (See next column for details.)

The recommendations were formulated by the STAC at its Aug. 5-6, 2009, meeting in Honolulu. At this meeting, the STAC also commended the Council on its Protected Species Conservation Program. Over the past six years, the program has been a major force in promoting and funding sea turtle conservation in the Pacific, they noted. The program addresses the interaction of leatherback and loggerhead turtles with the Hawaii-based longline fishery as some of these turtles pass through Hawaii waters during migrations between nesting beaches in the Western Pacific and foraging grounds in the northeastern Pacific.

The STAC meets annually to review the Council's sea turtle conservation projects and discuss directions for future Council-supported initiatives. Members include Milani Chaloupka (chair), Ecological Modeling Services (Australia); George Balazs, NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (Hawaii); Peter Dutton, NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center (California); Naoki Kamezaki, Sea Turtle Association of Japan (Japan); Colin Limpus, Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (Australia); Nicolas Pilcher, Marine Research Foundation (Malaysia); Jeffrey Polovina, NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (Hawaii); and Raquel Briseno Duenas, IUCN-MTSG Eastern Pacific Region/Unidad Academica Mazatlan (Mexico).

For more information, contact Asuka Ishizaki, the Council's protected species coordinator, at asuka.ishizaki@noaa.gov.



Yoshimasa Matsuzawa (far right with headset) listens to English dialogue translated into Japanese by professional interpreters Ayano Hara and Maya Perry during the STAC meeting. The interpreters made it possible for Matsuzawa and other Japanese participants to closely follow the meeting without misunderstandings and to participate in the discussion with ease.

Sea Turtle Program Major Priorities for 2010

Ongoing Projects

- **Japan:** Continue to support egg relocation where appropriate and evaluate as a valid conservation strategy.
- **Papua, Indonesia:** (a) Consider liaising with the Western Pacific leatherback working group to consider options for predator control; and (b) Continue to consider the Western Pacific leatherbacks, particularly the leatherback nesting populations in this area, as a high priority for conservation of Pacific leatherbacks.
- **TREDS:** Continue to support TREDS and its ongoing development and improvement, and explore alternative sources of long-term funding. (For more on this recently launched Pacific sea turtle database, see *Pacific Islands Fishery News*, summer 2009, page 10.)
- **Huon Coast, Papua New Guinea:** Consider a review of the project's passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag capture-mark-recapture data of leatherbacks for demographic parameter estimation.

Future Projects and Considerations

- **Baja California Sur:** Continue to consider necropsy work to identify cause-specific loggerhead mortality in the region.
- **North Pacific and Japan:** Consider a future project proposal to analyze the extensive backlog of North Pacific loggerhead bycatch samples as well as a more expanded sample of rookeries throughout the Japanese Archipelago.
- **Japan:** In support of the position held by the Sea Turtle Association of Japan, continue to note that the hatch-and-release practice in Japan is not an acceptable practice to ensure long-term survival of the Japanese loggerhead stock.
- **Research:** (a) Consider supporting sea turtle aging studies; and (b) continue to support sea turtle laparoscopy studies on key demographic parameters such as breeding rates.



The STAC recommended ongoing support of turtle egg relocation in Japan where appropriate. Pictured is one such past effort as high tide comes in with the approach of a typhoon at Yakushima Island, Kagoshima Prefecture, in 2007. Photo courtesy of Yakushima Umigame Kan.



Photo courtesy of (c) Robin W. Baird/www.cascadiaresearch.org

FALSE KILLER WHALE SUBGROUP PROPOSED FOR ESA LISTING

In September 2009, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) received a petition from the National Resource Defense Council to list a subgroup of false killer whales (*Pseudorca residens*) categorized as the Hawaii insular stock as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). If NMFS initially determines that the petition includes substantial information that may warrant an ESA listing, it must convene a Biological Review Team to conduct a status review.

In other news, on Oct. 30, 2009, the US District Court in Hawaii ruled in favor of NMFS in the lawsuit filed by Earthjustice (as attorneys for Hui Malama i Kohola, Center for Biological Diversity and Turtle Island Restoration Network), claiming that the Hawaii longline fishery was operating in violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) because NMFS had not convened a False Killer Whale Take Reduction Team (FKW TRT). The district court held that the MMPA did not require NMFS to establish a FKW TRT because the agency had properly prioritized its use of marine mammal conservation funds and determined that it lacked sufficient appropriations to fund the TRT. On Nov. 10, 2009, the environmental groups appealed to the Ninth Circuit.

Meanwhile, NMFS is moving forward with the FKW TRT process. A Pre-FKW TRT Informational Meeting was convened Nov. 19-20, 2009, on Oahu, and a tentative first FKW TRT meeting is planned for February 2010.

STAJ HONORED AT 20TH JAPANESE SEA TURTLE SYMPOSIUM

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, along with the Marine Turtle Research Program and the Ecosystem Oceanography Division of NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, presented an Award of Commendation to the Sea Turtle Association of Japan (STAJ) at the 20th Japanese Sea Turtle Symposium, held in Miyazaki-City, Japan, on Nov. 27-29, 2009.

Since its establishment in 1990, STAJ has worked with a large network of individuals, researchers and organizations to conduct research, monitoring and conservation of sea turtles throughout Japan. While monitoring of some nesting beaches began in Japan as early as 1950, and many individual monitoring programs were established by the mid-1980s, there was no nationwide network and information exchange of those involved with sea turtle work in Japan. The Association was established by Dr. Naoki Kamezaki (current president of STAJ; also a member of the Council's Sea Turtle Advisory Committee) to fill this gap and to stimulate information exchange through a central organization, annual symposia and publications. STAJ also standardized the tagging and measuring methods and equipment used in sea turtle research. Today, STAJ continues to be the focal point for most sea turtle activities in Japan, and its staff and members work tirelessly to make a positive impact on sea turtle conservation.

Also at the 20th Japanese Sea Turtle Symposium, the Council's Executive Director Kitty Simonds gave a presentation entitled "Sea Turtle Conservation and Fisheries in the United States." The presentation was the invitational keynote address to a session on sea turtle conservation in the North Pacific. It focused on U.S. federal regulations related to sea turtle conservation as well as the Council's experience in reducing impacts to sea turtle populations by approximately 90 percent in the Hawaii-based longline fishery. The presentation was received with great enthusiasm by the symposium participants. The Council's protected species coordinator, Asuka Ishizaki, also attended the symposium and provided translations for Simonds' presentation.



President Naoki Kamezaki accepts the award of commendation to the Sea Turtle Association of Japan (STAJ).



Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds and George Balazs of the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) present a commendation award to STAJ President Naoki Kamezaki (far right) and the association's eldest member, Kiyoshi Goto. A resident of Minabe Town (Wakayama Prefecture), Goto began monitoring sea turtle nesting activity more than 20 years ago when he was the principal at a local elementary school. He still walks the beaches nightly during the loggerhead nesting season. Also pictured are (far left) Donald Kobayashi of PIFSC and (in background) STAJ Senior Scientist Yoshimasa Matsuzawa. Photo courtesy of STAJ.